THE TOWER OF TIME
BY ROBERT E. HOWARD & LIN CARTER

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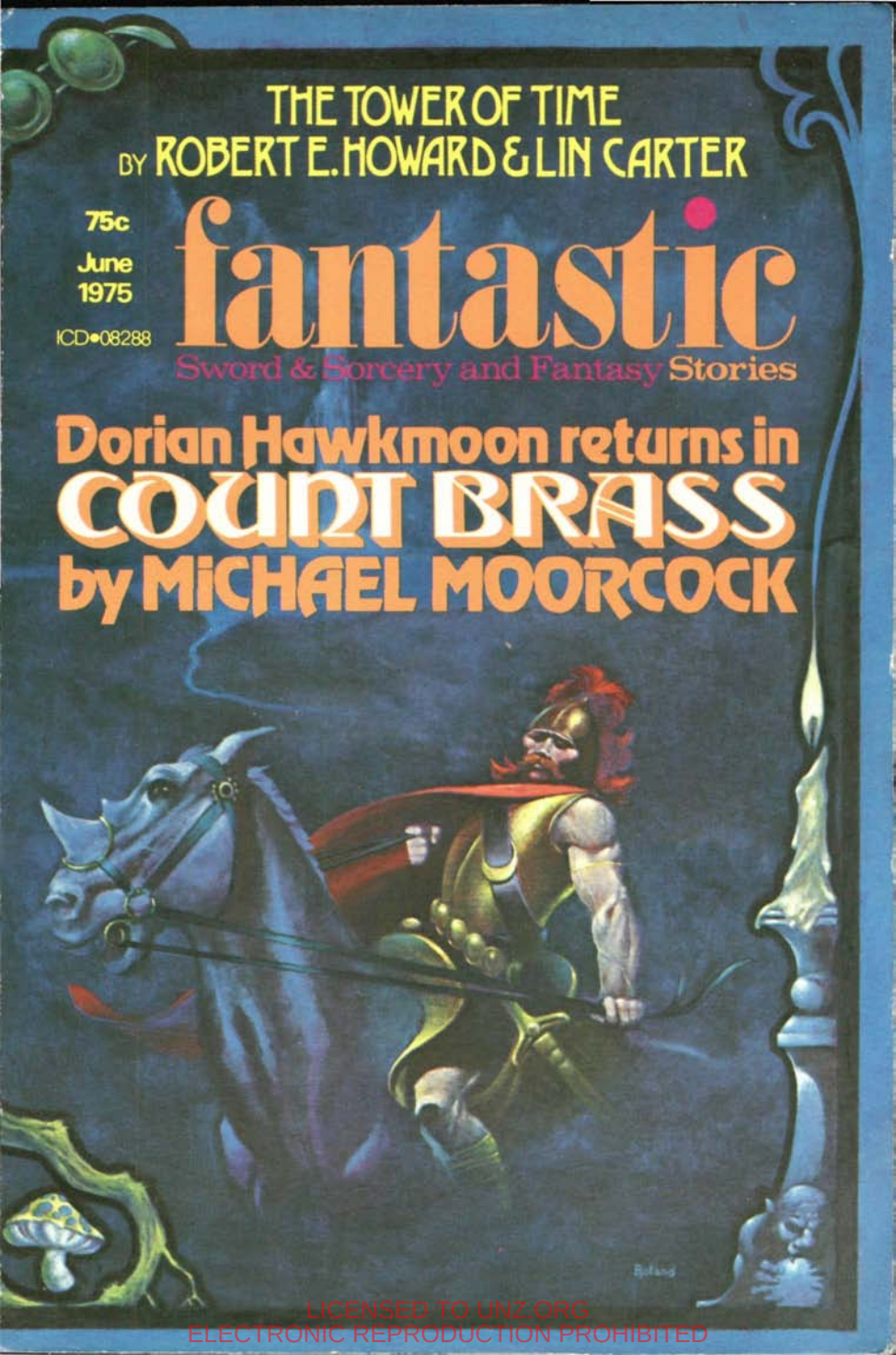
fantastic

Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories

Dorian Hawkmoon returns in COUNT BRASS by MICHAEL MOORCOCK



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ALL STORIES NEW

JUNE, 1975 Vol. 24, No. 4

Fantastic

Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories

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TED WHITE editorial

THIS ISSUE *I'm presenting a guest editorial from our Associate Editor Emeritus, Grant Carrington, in this space. Grant calls it "Clarion: A Reminiscence and a Reevaluation," and I have only one comment in preface: I hope Glen Cook is no longer writing things like "Bob Silverberg told Harlan and I. . ."*—TED WHITE

THE MAY 1970 issue of AMAZING contained a letter from Glen Cook that read in part: "Clarion is the only place where persons interested in writing science fiction and fantasy can actually study the trade under acknowledged masters in the field. . . Bob Silverberg told Harlan and I he could not openly support the workshop because he did not believe writing could be taught. Talent cannot, we'll all agree. But if you begin with talented people and teach what *can* be taught (mechanics, style, etc.), you get tremendous results. . . . There have been 22 full-time students in the two years since its inception. . . . Thus, far 15 have made sales to professional markets, to: *Again, Dangerous Visions, New Dimensions Infinity I, & FSF, If, Galaxy, New Worlds, Generation I & II, Swank, Adam, Knight, Avante Garde,* FANTASTIC *Vision, Starship '69,* and others. There have been, at last count, 23 short stories, two novels, two TV scripts, one play, several articles, two songs, 'about 25 poems,' and an 'Indian Pageant' sold by workshop students. At least three of those students are now full-time, self-supporting writers. One man has sold ten stories in less than three months. . . . Harlan tells me that of all the people he has taught at the University of Colorado Workshop (mainstream), a massively sized thing, only two have ever sold anything."

Well, more than four years have passed, and the Clarion Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers' Workshop has passed on the Tulane University, Michigan State University (Clarion East), and the University of Washington (Clarion West). The seemingly impressive statistics that Glen quoted in 1970 no longer seem to hold up quite so impressively. But before we take a look at what's happened in the past four years, let's examine Glen's statements more closely.

The Clarion Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers' Workshop was organized at Clarion State College, Clarion, Pa., in 1968. It was patterned after the Milford Conference. Robin Scott Wilson, an ex-CIA man who had taken a job as English professor at Clarion, was its founder. Robin had written several science fiction stories, including some humorous spy stories, and

(cont. on page 49)

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Michael Moorcock's last story for us was "The Sleeping Sorceress," an Elric novella which appeared in our February, 1972 issue. His new novel (which is being serialized here in two parts) is a sequel to his popular Runestaff series and the first volume of The Chronicles of Castle Brass. *Here we meet again Dorian Hawkmoon as he confronts a startling ghost—the ghost of—*

COUNT BRASS

MICHAEL MOORCOCK

First of Two Parts

Book One
OLD FRIENDS

Then the Earth grew old, its landscapes mellowing and showing signs of age, its ways becoming whimsical and strange in the manner of a man in his last years.
–The High History of the Runestaff

And when this History was done there followed it another. A Romance involving the same participants in experiences perhaps even more bizarre and awesome than the last. And again the ancient Castle of Brass in the marshy Kamarg was the centre for much of this action. . .
–The Chronicles of Castle Brass

CHAPTER ONE
The Haunting of Dorian Hawkmoon

IT HAD TAKEN all these five years to restore the land of Kamarg, to repopulate its marshes with the giant scarlet flamingoes, the wild white bulls and the horned greay horses which had once teemed here before the coming of the Dark Empire's bestial armies. It had taken all these five years to rebuild the watchtowers of the borders, to put up the towns and to erect tall Castle Brass in all its massive, masculine beauty. And if anything, in these five years of peace, the walls were built stronger, the watchtowers taller, for, as Dorian Hawkmoon had said once to Queen Flana of Granbretan, the world was still wild and there was still little justice in it.

Dorian Hawkmoon, the Duke of Köln, and his bride, Yisselda, Countess of Brass, old, dead Count Brass's daughter, were the only two who remained of that

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group of heroes who had served the Runestaff against the Dark Empire and finally defeated Granbretan in the great Battle of Londra, putting Queen Flana, sad Queen Flana, upon the throne so that she might guide her cruel and decadent nation towards humanity and vitality.

Count Brass had died slaying three barons (Adaz Promp, Mygel Holst and Saka Gerden) and in turn was slain by a spearman of the Order of the Goat.

Oladahn of the Bulgar Mountains, beastman and loyal friend of Hawkmoon, had been hacked to pieces by the war axes of the Order of the Pig.

Bowgentle, the unwarlike, the philosophical, had been savaged and decapitated by Pigs, Goats and Hounds to the number of twelve.

Huillam D'Averc, mocker of everything, whose only faith had seemed to be in his own lack of good health, who had loved and been loved by Queen Flana, had died most ironically, riding to his love and being slain by one of her soldiers who thought D'Averc attacked her.

Four heroes died. Thousands of other heroes, unnamed in the histories, but brave, also died in the service of the Runestaff, in the destruction of the Dark Empire tyranny.

And a great villain died. Baron Meliadus of Kroiden, most ambitious, most ambivalent, most awful of all the aristocrats of Granbretan, died upon the sword of Hawkmoon, died beneath the edge of the mystical Sword of the Dawn.

And the ruined world seemed free.

BUT THAT HAD BEEN five years hence. Much had passed since then. Two children had been born to Hawkmoon and the Countess of Brass. They were called Manfred, who had red hair and his grandfather's voice and health and stood to be his grandfather's size and strength, and Yarmila, who had golden hair and her mother's gentle toughness of will, as well as her beauty. They were Brass stock; there was little in them of the Dukes of Köln, and perhaps that was why Dorian Hawkmoon loved his children so fiercely and so well.

And beyond the walls of Castle Brass stood four statues to the four dead heroes, to remind the inhabitants of the castle of what they had fought for and at what cost. And Dorian Hawkmoon would often take his children to those statues and tell them of the Dark Empire and its deeds. And they were pleased to listen. And Manfred assured his father that when he grew up, his deeds would be as great as those of old Count Brass, whom he so resembled.

And Hawkmoon would say that he hoped they would have no need of heroes when Manfred was grown.

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Then, seeing disappointment in his son's face, he would laugh and say there were many kinds of heroes and if Manfred had his grandfather's wisdom and diplomacy, his strong sense of justice, that would make him the best kind of hero—a justice-maker. And Manfred would only be somewhat consoled, for there is little that is romantic about a judge and much that is attractive to a four year old boy about a warrior.

And sometimes Hawkmoon and Yisselda would take their children riding through the wild marshlands of the Kamarg, beneath wide skies of pastel colours, of faded reds and yellows, where the reeds were brown and dark green and orange and, in the appropriate season, bent before the mistral. And they would see a herd of white bulls thunder by, or a herd of horned horses. And they might see a flock of huge scarlet flamingoes suddenly take to the air and drift on broad wings over the heads of the invading human beings, not knowing that it was Dorian Harkmoon's responsibility, as it had been that of Count Brass, to protect the wildlife of the Kamarg and never to kill it, and only sometimes to tame it to provide riding beasts for land and sky. Originally this had been why the great watchtowers had been built and why the men who occupied those watchtowers were called Guardians. But now they guarded the human populace as well as the beasts, guarded them from any threat from beyond the Kamarg's borders (for no native-bred Karmargian would consider harming the animals which were found nowhere else in the world). The only beasts that were hunted (save for food) in the marshes were the baragoon, the marsh gibberers, the things which had once been men themselves before becoming the victims of sorcerous experiments conducted by an evil Lord Guardian who had been done away with by old Count Brass. But there were only one or two baragoons left in the Kamarg lands now for hunters had little difficulty identifying them—they were over eight feet tall, five feet broad, bile-coloured and they slithered on their bellies through the swamps, occasionally rising to rush upon whatever prey they could now find in the marshlands. Nonetheless, on their rides, Yisselda and Dorian Hawkmoon would take care to avoid the places still thought to be inhabited by the baragoon.

Hawkmoon had come to love the Kamarg more than his own ancestral lands in far off Germany; had even renounced his title to those lands now ruled well by an elected council as indeed were many of the European lands which had lost their hereditary rulers and chosen, since the defeat of the Dark Empire, to become republics.

Yet, for all that Hawkmoon was loved and respected by the peo-

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ple of the Kamarg, he was aware that he did not replace old Count Brass in their eyes. He could never do that. They sought Countess Yisselda's advice as often as they sought his and they looked with great favour on young Manfred, seeing him almost as a reincarnation of their old Lord Guardian.

Another man might have resented all this, but Hawkmoon, who had loved Count Brass as well as had they, accepted it with good grace. He had had enough of command, of heroics. He preferred to live the life of a simple country gentleman and wherever possible let the people have control of their own affairs. His ambitions were simple, too—to love his beautiful wife Yisselda and to ensure the happiness of his children. His days of history-making were over. All that he had left to remind him of his struggles against Granbretan was an oddly shaped scar in the centre of his forehead—where once had reposed the dreadful Black Jewel, the braineater implanted there by Baron Kalan of Vitall when, years before, Hawkmoon had been recruited against his will to serve the Dark Empire against Count Brass. Now the jewel was gone and so was Baron Kalan, who had committed suicide after the Battle of Londra. A brilliant scientist, but perhaps the most warped of all the barons of Granbretan, Kalan had been unable to conceive of continuing to exist under the new and, in his view, soft order imposed by Queen Flana, who had succeeded the King Emperor Huon after Baron Meliadus had slain him in a desperate effort to make himself controller of Granbretan's policies.

Hawkmoon sometimes wondered what would have happened to Baron Kalan or, for that matter, Taragorm, Master of the Palace of Time, who had perished when one of Kalan's fiendish weapons had exploded during the Battle of Londra, if they had lived on. Could they have been put into the service of Queen Flana and their talents used to rebuild the world they had helped destroy? Probably not, he thought. They were insane. Their characters had been wholly shaped by the perverted and insane philosophies which had led Granbretan to make war upon the world and come close to conquering it all.

After one of their marshland rides, the family would return to Aigues-Mortes, the walled and ancient town which was the principle city of the Kamarg, and to Castle Brass which stood on a hill in the very centre. Built of the same white stone as the majority of the town's houses, Castle Brass was a mixture of architectural styles which, somehow, did not seem to clash with each other. Over the centuries there had been additions and renovations; at the whim of different owners parts had been torn down and

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other parts built. Most of the windows were of intricately detailed stained glass, though the window frames themselves were as often round as they were square and as square as they were oblong or oval. Turrets and towers sprang up from the main mass of stone in all kinds of surprising places; there were even one or two minarets in the manner of Arabian palaces. And Dorian Hawkmoon, following the fashion of his own German folk, had had many flagstaffs erected and upon these staffs floated beautiful coloured banners, including those of the Counts of Brass and the Dukes of Köln. Gargoyles festooned the gutters of the castle and many a gable was carved in stone in the likeness of a Kamargian beast—the bull, the flamingo, the horned horse and the marsh bear.

There was about Castle Brass, as there had been in the days of Count Brass himself, something at once impressive and comfortable. The castle had not been built to impress anyone with either the taste or the power of its inhabitants. It had hardly been built for strength (though it had already proven its strength) and aesthetic considerations, too, had not been made when rebuilding it. It had been built for comfort and this was a rare thing in a castle. It could be that it was the only castle in the world that had been built with such considerations in mind! Even the terraced gardens outside the castle walls had a homely appearance, growing vegetables and flowers of every sort, supplying not only the castle but much of the town with its basic requirements.

When they returned from their rides the family would sit down to a good, plain meal which would be shared with many of its retainers, then the children would be taken to bed by Yisselda and she would tell them a story. Sometimes the story would be an ancient one, from the time before the Tragic Millenium, sometimes it would be one she would make up herself and sometimes, at the insistence of Manfred and Yarmila, Dorian Hawkmoon would be called for and he would tell them of some of his adventures in distant lands when he served the Runestaff. He would tell them of how he had met little Oladahn, whose body and face had been covered in fine, reddish hair, and who had claimed to be the kin of Mountain Giants. He would tell them of Amarehk beyond the great sea of the north and the magical city of Dnark where he had first seen the Runestaff itself. Admittedly, Hawkmoon had to modify these tales, for the truth was darker and more terrible than most adult minds could conceive. He spoke most often of his dead friends and their noblest deeds, keeping alive the memories of Count Brass, Bowgentle, D'Averc and Oladahn. Already these deeds were legendary throughout

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Europe.

And when the stories were done, Yisselda and Dorian Hawkmoon would sit in deep armchairs on either side of the great fireplace over which hung Count Brass's armour of brass and his broadsword, and they would talk or they would read.

From time to time they would receive letters from Londra, from Queen Flana telling how her policies progressed. Londra, that insane roofed city, had been almost entirely dismantled and fine, open buildings put up instead on both sides of the River Tayme, which no longer ran blood red. The wearing of masks had been abolished and most of the people of Granbretan had, after a while, become used to revealing their naked faces, though some diehards had had to receive mild punishment for their insistence on clinging to the old, mad ways of the Dark Empire. The Orders of the Beasts had also been outlawed and people had been encouraged to leave the darkness of their cities and return to the all but deserted and overgrown countryside of Granbretan, where vast forest of oak, elm or pine stretched for miles. For centuries Granbretan had lived on plunder and now she had to feed herself. Therefore the soldiers who had belonged to the beast orders were put to farming, to clearing the forests, to raising herds and planting crops. Local councils were set up to represent the interests of the people. Queen Flana had called a parliament and this parliament now advised her and helped her rule justly. It was strange how swiftly a warlike nation, a nation of military castes, had been encouraged to become a nation of farmers and foresters. The majority of the people of Granbretan had taken to their new lives with relief once it dawned on them that they were now free of the madness that had once infected the whole land —and sought, indeed, to infect the world.

And so the quiet days passed at Castle Brass.

And so they would have passed for always (until Manfred and Yarmila grew up and Hawkmoon and Yisselda became middle-aged and, eventually, old in their contentment, dying peacefully and cheerfully, knowing that the Kamarg was secure and that the days of the Dark Empire could never return) but for something strange that began to happen towards the close of the sixth summer since the Battle of Londra when, to his astonishment, Dorian Hawkmoon found that the people of Aigues-Mortes were beginning to offer him peculiar looks when he hailed them in the streets—some refusing to acknowledge him at all and others scowling and muttering and turning aside as he approached.

It was Dorian Hawkmoon's habit, as it had been Count Brass's, to attend the great celeb-

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rations marking the end of the summer's work. Then Aigues-Mortes would be decorated with flowers and banners and the citizens would put on their most elaborate finery, young white bulls would be allowed to charge at will through the streets and the guardians of the watchtowers would ride about in their polished armour and silk surcoats, their flame-lances on their hips. And there would be bull contests in the immeasurably ancient amphitheatre on the outskirts of the town. Here was where Count Brass had once saved the life of the great toreador Mahtan Just when he was being gored to death by a gigantic bull. Count Brass had leaped into the ring and wrestled the bull with his bare hands, bringing the beast to its knees and winning the acclaim of the crowd; for Count Brass had then been well into middle-age.

But nowadays the festival was not a purely local affair. Ambassadors from all over Europe would come to honour the surviving hero and heroine of Londra and Queen Flana herself had visited Castle Brass on two previous occasions. This year, however, Queen Flana had been kept at home by affairs of state and one of her nobles attended in her name. Hawkmoon was pleased to note that Count Brass's dream of a unified Europe was beginning to become reality. The wars with Granbretan had helped break down the old boundaries and had brought the survivors together in a common cause. Europe still consisted of about a thousand small provinces, each independant of any other, but they worked in concert on many projects concerning the general good.

The ambassadors came from Scandia, from Muscovy, from Arabia, from the lands of the Greeks and the Bulgars, from Ukrainia, from Nürnberg and Catalania. They came in carriages, on horseback or in ornithopters whose design was borrowed from Granbretan. And they brought gifts and they brought speeches (some long and some short) and they spoke of Dorian Hawkmoon as if he were a demigod.

In past years their praise had found enthusiastic response in the people of the Kamarg. But for some reason this year their speeches did not get quite the same quality of applause as they once had. Few, however, noticed. Only Hawkmoon and Yisselda noticed and, without being resentful, they were deeply puzzled.

The most fulsome of all the speeches made in the ancient bull-ring of Aigues Mortes came from Lonson, Prince of Shkarlan, cousin to Queen Flana, ambassador from Granbretan. Lonson was young and an enthusiastic supporter of the queen's policies. He had been barely seventeen when the Battle of Londra had robbed his nation of its evil power and thus he bore no great resentment of Dorian Hawkmoon

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von Köln—indeed, he saw Hawkmoon as a saviour, who had brought peace and sanity to his island kingdom. Prince Lonson's speech was rich with admiration for the new Lord Protector of the Kamarg. He recalled great deeds of battle, great achievements of will and self-discipline, great cunning in the arts of strategy and diplomacy by which, he said, future generations would remember Dorian Hawkmoon. Not only had Hawkmoon saved continental Europe—he had saved the Dark Empire from itself.

Seated in his traditional box with all his foreign guests about him, Dorian Hawkmoon listened to the speech with embarrassment and hoped it would soon end. He was dressed in ceremonial armour which was as ornate as it was uncomfortable and the back of his neck itched horribly. While Prince Lonson spoke it would not be polite to remove the helmet and scratch. He looked at the crowd seated on the granite benches of the amphitheatre and seated on the ground of the ring itself. Whereas most of the people were listening with approval to Prince Lonson's speech, others were muttering to each other, scowling. One old man, whom Hawkmoon recognised as an ex-guardian who had fought beside Count Brass in many of his battles, even spat into the dust of the arena when Prince Lonson spoke of Dorian Hawkmoon's unswerving loyalty to his comrades.

Yisselda also noticed this and she frowned, glancing at Hawkmoon to see if he had noticed. Their eyes met. Dorian Hawkmoon shrugged and gave her a little smile. She smiled back, but the frown did not altogether leave her brow.

And at last the speech was over and applauded and the people began to leave the arena so that the first of the bulls might be driven in and the first toreador attempt to remove the colourful ribbons which were tied to the beast's horns (for it was not the custom of the folk of the Kamarg to exhibit their courage by slaying animals—instead skill alone was pitted against the snorting savagery of the very fiercest bulls).

But when the crowd had departed there was one who remained. Now Hawkmoon recalled his name. It was Czernik, originally a Bulgar mercenary who had thrown in his lot with Count Brass and ridden with him through a dozen campaigns. Czernik's face was flushed, as if he had been drinking, and his stance was unsteady as he pointed a finger up at Hawkmoon's box and spat again.

"Loyalty!" the old man croaked. "I know otherwise. I know who is Count Brass's murderer—who betrayed him to his enemies! Coward! Play-actor! False hero!"

Hawkmoon was stunned as he listened to Czernik rant. What could the old man mean?

Stewards ran into the ring to

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grasp Czernik's arms and attempt to hurry him off. But he struggled with them.

"Thus your master tries to silence the truth!" screamed Czernik. "But it cannot be silenced! He has been accused by the only one whose word can be trusted!"

If it had only been Czernik who had shown such animosity, Hawkmoon would have dismissed his ravings as senile. But Czernik was not the only one. Czernik had expressed what Hawkmoon had seen on more than a score of faces that day—and on previous days.

"Let him be!" Hawkmoon called, standing up and leaning forward over the balustrade. "Let him speak!"

For a moment the stewards were at a loss to know what to do. Then, reluctantly, they released the old man. Czernik stood there trembling, glaring into Hawkmoon's eyes.

"Now," Hawkmoon called. "Tell me of what you accuse me, Czernik. I will listen."

The attention of the whole populace of Aigues-Mortes was upon Hawkmoon and Czernik now. There was a stillness, a silence in the air.

Yisselda tugged at her husband's surcoat. "Do not listen to him, Dorian. He is drunk. He is mad."

"Tell me!" Hawkmoon demanded.

Czernik scratched his head of grey, thinning hair. He stared around him at the crowd. He mumbled something.

"Speak more clearly!" Hawkmoon said. "I am eager to hear, Czernik."

"I called you murderer and murderer you be!" Czernik said.

"Who told you that I am a murderer!"

Again Czernik's mumble was inaudible.

"Who told you?"

"The one you murdered!" Czernik screamed. "The one you betrayed."

"A dead man? Whom did I betray."

"The one we all love. The one I followed across a hundred provinces. The one who saved my life twice. The one to whom, living or dead, I would ever give my loyalty."

Yisselda's whisper from behind Hawkmoon was incredulous. "He can speak of none other but my father. . ."

"Do you mean Count Brass?" Hawkmoon called.

"Aye!" cried Czernik defiantly. "Count Brass, who came to the Kamarg all those years ago and saved it from tyranny. Who fought the Dark Empire and saved the whole world! His deeds are well-known. What was not known was that at Londra he was betrayed by one who not only coveted his daughter but coveted his castle, too. And killed him for them!"

"You lie," said Hawkmoon evenly. "If you were younger, Czernik, I would challenge you to

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defend your foul words with a sword. How could you believe such lies?"

"Many believe them!" Czernik gestured to indicate the crowd. "Many here have heard what I have heard."

"*Where* have they heard this?" Yisselda joined her husband at the balustrade.

"In the marshlands beyond the town. At night. Some, like me, journeying home from another town—they have heard it."

"And from whose lying lips?" Hawkmoon was trembling with anger.

"From his own! From Count Brass's lips."

"Drunken fool! Count Brass is dead. You said as much yourself."

"Aye—but his ghost has returned to the Kamarg. Riding upon the back of his great horned horse in all his armour of gleaming brass, with his hair and his moustache all red as brass and his eyes like burnished brass. He is out there, treacherous Hawkmoon, in the marsh. He haunts you. And those who meet him are told of your treachery, how you deserted him when his enemies beset him, how you let him die in Londra."

"It *is* a lie!" shouted Yisselda. "I was there. I fought at Londra. Nothing could save my father."

"And," continued Czernik, his voice deepening but still loud, "I heard from Count Brass how you joined with your lover to deceive him."

"Oh!" Yisselda clapped her hands to her ears. "This is obscene! Obscene!"

"Be silent now, Czernik," warned Hawkmoon hollowly. "Still your tongue, for you go too far!"

"He awaits you in the marshes. He will take his vengeance upon you out there at night when next you travel beyond the walls of Aigues-Mortes—if you dare. And his ghost is still more of a hero, more of a man than are you, turncoat. Aye—turncoat you be. First you served Köln, then you served the Empire, then you turned against the Empire, then you aided the Empire in its plot against Count Brass, then once again you betrayed the Empire. Your history speaks for the truth of what I say. I am not mad. I am not drunk. There are others who have seen and heard what I have seen and heard."

"Then you have been deceived," said Yisselda firmly.

"It is you who have been deceived, my lady!" Czernik growled.

And then the stewards came forward again and Hawkmoon did not try to stop them as they dragged the old man from the amphitheatre.

The rest of the proceedings did not go well, after that. Hawkmoon's guests were too embarrassed to comment on the incident and the crowd's interest was not on the bulls or the toreadors who leaped so skilfully

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about the ring, plucking the ribbons from the horns.

A banquet followed at Castle Brass. To the banquet had been invited all the local dignitaries of the Kamarg, as well as the ambassadors, and it was noticeable that four or five of the local people had not come. Hawkmoon ate little and drank more than was normal for him. He tried hard to rid himself of the gloomy mood into which Czernik's peculiar declarations had put him, but he found it difficult to smile even when his own children came down to greet him and be introduced to his guests. Every sentence he spoke required an effort and there was no flow of conversation, even amongst the guests. Many of the ambassadors made excuses and went early to their beds. And soon only Hawkmoon and Yisselda were left in the banquetting hall, still seated in their places at the head of the table, watching the servants clear away the remains of the meal.

"What could he have seen?" said Yisselda as, at last, the servants, too, left. "What could he have heard, Dorian?"

Hawkmoon shrugged. "He told us. Your father's ghost. . ."

"A baragoon more articulate than most?"

"He described your father. His horse. His armour. His face."

"But he was drunk even today."

"He said that others saw Count Brass and heard the same story from his lips."

"Then it is a plot. Some enemy of yours—one of the Dark Empire lords who survived unrepentant—dressed up with false whiskers and his face painted to resemble my father's."

"That could be," said Hawkmoon. "But would not Czernik of all people have seen through such a deception? He knew Count Brass for years."

"Aye. And knew him well," Yisselda admitted.

Hawkmoon rose slowly from his chair and walked heavily towards the fireplace where Count Brass's war-gear hung. He looked up at it, reached out to finger it. He shook his head. "I must discover for myself what this 'ghost' is. Why should anyone seek to discredit me in this way? Who could my enemy be?"

"Czernik himself? Could he resent your presence at Castle Brass?"

"Czernik is old—near-senile. He could not have invented such an elaborate deception."

"Has he not wondered why Count Brass should remain in the marshes complaining about me? That is not like Count Brass. He would come to his own castle if he were here. If he had a grudge he would tax me with it."

"You speak as if you believe Czernik now."

Hawkmoon sighed. "I must know more. I must find Czernik and question him. . ."

"I will send one of our retainers into the town."

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"No. I will go into the town and search him out."

"Are you sure. . . ?"

"It is what I must do." He kissed her. "I'll put an end to this tonight. Why should we be plagued by phantoms we have not even seen?"

He wrapped a thick cloak of dark blue silk about his shoulders and kissed Yisselda once more before going out into the courtyard and ordering his horned horse saddled and harnessed. Some minutes later he rode out from the castle and down the winding road to the town. Few lights burned in Aigues-Mortes, for all that there was supposed to be a festival in the town. Evidently the townspeople had been as affected by the scene in the bullring as had Hawkmoon and his guests. The wind was beginning to blow as Harkmoon reached the streets; the harsh mistral wind of the Kamarg, which the people hereabouts called the Life Wind, for it was supposed to have saved their land during the Tragic Millenium.

If Czernik was to be found anywhere it was in one of the taverns on the north side of town. Hawkmoon rode to the district, letting his horse make its own speed, for in many ways he was reluctant to repeat the earlier scene. He did not want to hear Czernik's lies again; they were lies which dishonoured all, even Count Brass, whom Czernik claimed to love.

The old taverns on the north side were primarily of wood, with only their foundations being made of the white stone of the Kamarg. The wood was painted in many different colours and some of the most ambitious of the taverns had even painted whole scenes across the frontages—several of the scenes commemorating the deeds of Hawkmoon himself and others recalling earlier exploits of Count Brass before he came to save the Kamarg, for Count Brass had fought (and often been a prime mover) in almost every famous battle of his day. Indeed, not a few of the taverns were named for Count Brass's battles, as well as those of the four heroes who had served the Runestaff. One tavern was called The Magyarian Campaign while another proclaimed itself The Battle of Cannes. Here were The Fort at Balancia, Nine Left Standing and The Banner Dipped in Blood—all recalling Count Brass's exploits. Czernik, if he had not fallen on his face in some gutter by now, would be bound to be in one of them.

Hawkmoon entered the nearest door, that of The Red Amulet (named for that mystic jewel he had once worn around his own neck), and found the place packed with old soldiers, many of whom he recognised. They were all pretty drunk, with big mugs of wine and ale in their hands. There was hardly a man amongst them who did not have scars on his face or limbs. Their laughter

(cont. on page 86)

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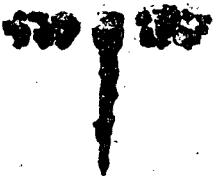

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In the late 1920's—around the same time that he was writing Valley of the Worm *and* The Garden of Fear*—Robert E. Howard began work on this story, which he set aside after having written between two-thirds and three-quarters of it. Like the other two stories, it was one of the James Allison "racial memory" yarns—and with Glen Lord's permission Lin Carter has finished and titled it—*

THE TOWER OF TIME

ROBERT E. HOWARD & LIN CARTER

Illustrated by Michael Nally

ONCE I WAS Hengibar the Wanderer. I cannot explain my knowledge of this fact by any occult or esoteric maunderings, nor shall I try. A man remembers his past life: I remember my past *lives*. Just as an ordinary man recalls the shapes that were he in childhood, boyhood, and youth, so do I recall the shapes that I have inhabited in forgotten ages. Why this memory is mine I cannot say, any more than I can explain the myriad and mysterious phenomena of nature which confront me every day. But as I lie waiting for death to free me from the disease which has consumed my life, it is somehow given to me to peer down the grand vistas of time behind me and to see with a clear, sure sight the many lives that I have lived before.

I see the men who have been I, and I see the beasts that I once was before there were men. For my memory does not end with the beginnings of our race. How could it, when the brute so shades into the human by indefinable gradations so fine that there exists no sharp line of demarcation to set the boundaries of beasthood? Even as I write these words I envision a dim twilight scene set among the gigantic trees of a primordial forest that has yet to feel the tread of a leather-shod foot. And I see a vast, shaggy, shambling bulk that lumbers along, sometimes upright and sometimes on all fours. He delves under rotten logs for fat grubs and insect mites, and his small ears twitch continually. He lifts his brutish head to snuff the air and bares yellow fangs. He is a primal, bestial anthropoid, more beast than man; yet he is James Allison and I am he. Ages divide us, yet kinship stretches between us, and I recognize the kinship. Kinship? Say rather oneness. For there is no question of kinship; I

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am he, he is I. My flesh is soft and white and hairless, his is dark and tough and shaggy with matted fur. Yet we are one, and already in his dim, enshadowed brain are beginning to stir the first feeble man-thoughts and man-dreams. They are crude, chaotic and fleeting, those first faint stirrings of intelligence and imagination; yet they are the beginnings of all the high and lofty visions that men will someday dream.

But I see beyond the shaggy, grunting brute-man—back, back, down vistas I dare not follow—into abysses too awful and nightmarish for a modern mind to plumb and to come back from sane. Back to the steaming swamps of fetid slime, where scaled and ghastly shapes squeal and flounder, wriggling in the mud of dim, prehuman seas. And even here I sense my eternal kinship and identity with squirming reptile-things that bear no slightest semblance to my kind. Even in the reeking fens I sense identity with half-glimpsed and hissing forms; even here I recognize my own individuality.

For, I tell you, the individual is never lost, either in the vile slime-pits from which we came, squirming and squalling, or in that eventual, sweet golden Nirvana to which we shall someday ascend—and which I, alone of all my kind, have glimpsed afar off, shining like a cool twilight lake of peace among the serene stars.

BUT ENOUGH! For I would tell you of Hengibar, the warrior and the wanderer of a forgotten world, and of the strange thing that befell him in a tower builded beyond all ages and centuries, outside the reach and the very touch of time. Oh, it was long, long ago! How long I care not and I cannot say. Why should I seek for paltry contemporary comparisons to describe a realm indescribably remote? What are years or centuries or eons to the individual spark of identity, which outlives all ages and epochs, wandering down the corridor of millions of years, dwelling in body after body, life after life?

I was once Hengibar—when, I shall not try to say. And when I, the sickly weakling, the hopeless cripple, remember Hengibar, I could shout aloud for joy. Aye! For the sheer, exultant joy of glorying in primitive, indomitable might and courage. Oh, for the song of hot, healthy blood singing through strong veins, pumped by a heart tireless as a dynamo! Oh, for the bliss of great thews rippling under a tanned, bronze hide! Who said the mind is the only measurement of the man? I say to you the rich blood, the steely muscles, the strong bones, the tough fibre of the flesh are as much the measure of a man as the grey pulp of the brain and the golden dreams that rise within it.

We modern men are children, matched against such as Hengibar! Because we are soft and

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white and weak, pampered by machines, cushioned against the raw force of nature, we despise the brute magnificence of the primitive. What do we know of strength or vigor? I tell you there is not one man on earth today who feels the surging glory of superhuman physical power and iron endurance I knew when I was Hengibar the Wanderer —Hengibar the Mighty —Hengibar of the Dawn! I, who lie here weak and flabby, my sinews like rotten cords, my flesh rotten with disease, remember the unconquerable strength I knew in that lost age, when a man could battle mighty brutes and warriors, trek countless miles through hostile jungles swarming with ferocious monsters, eat and drink and love with the vigor and appetite of the gods!

When I was Hengibar of the Dawn, every cell, fibre and tissue of my giant frame was quick and vibrant with singing life and perfect health. My senses were sharp and keen as whetted knives. I could track the great brutes by their spoor over leagues of jungle or mountain. I could hear sounds that have been inaudible to decadent, lesser men for scores of centuries, sense the presence of Beings other than flesh and blood, feel the radiation of powers we "civilized" men mock as supernatural and non-existent.

Yet I was not very different from men of today. My eyes were blue as Arctic ice, my flesh bronze from burning suns, my long, thick hair yellow—not the colorless, straw-like hue of today, but raw living gold with the fury of the sun caught in it. I went naked, my tough hide bared to sun and rain and wind alike, my loins girt with a bit of leopard-skin. With either hand I could wield a heavy, flint-bladed axe massive as a hammer. Such as I am now, my weak arms would tremble and strain merely to heft so massive a weight; to Hengibar it was light as a willow-wand.

I was akin to the tribe with whom I warred and wandered, but not truly of their breed. Like me, they were tall and blue-eyed, but their hair was flaming crimson. They were of Vanaheim and I was of Asgard, the twin nations of Nordheim, the shadowy, now-mythical homeland of the proto-Aryans. In Hengibar's lost age, the bulk of the Nordheimr dwelt there still, in fur tents among the snows, in that far land historians have forgot and archaeologists have not found. The golden-haired Aesir and the red-haired Vanir warred ever amongst themselves, in a forgotten war fought long before history began, whose dim memory lingers yet in the legends of the Norse. From time to time the pressure of a growing population forced a drift of tribes to wander out of that mountain-ringed homeland, to roam the primal continents in search of a new home.

I must have been born on one

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of those century-long migrations. Who my fathers were I never knew. The Vanir tribe led by Wolfang the One-eyed found me as a babe amidst a dark primordial forest in the west, alone and naked, my mouth wet with the hot blood of the bear-cub I had strangled with my little hands, my belly filled with the raw bear-flesh I had torn with infant teeth from the still-warm corpse beside me. When they came upon me they say I snarled at them like a wolf's-whelp. And Wolfgang, seeing my yellow hair, and knowing me for a cub of the ancient foes of his kind, would have dashed out my brains with his axe, but when he took me by the nape of the neck I struggled and fought, without whimpering, and sunk my milk-white teeth into his hairy arm.

"By Ymir," he rumbled, "the cub has wolf-blood in him. We will let him live, to grow among us and he will become a mighty man—aye, a drinker of blood, an eater of raw flesh! Mighty will he be in the hunt and the war. Well will he repay the clan for our mercy in the days to come."

Aye, and that I did, by the icy beard of Ymir! When the terrible dragon of the swamps thundered upon us, it was I who clung to its scaled and mighty neck and hacked and tore out its throat with my flint knife—and I but a half-grown boy at the time. And when the shaggy devil-things of the deep woods fell upon us, roaring with blood-lust, little red beast-eyes burning like coals in the black horror of their faces, it was I who stood and fought them, with club and axe and spear and naked hands, rallying the men of the tribe about me—and I scarce out of my teens at the time.

Yes, truly may it be said that many times over I repaid the tribe of Wolfang for their whim in letting me live. In war and the hunt, none surpassed me in the days of my youth, and it was as a full-grown warrior, in the high noon of my manhood, that I repaid them yet again when I came to the devil-haunted Valley of Akram.

IN THOSE YEARS we wandered down through the forest-girt heartlands of the mighty continent, ranging far for meat to feed the women, the oldsters, and our young. I was fleetest of foot among the full-grown males; thus I was one of the scouts who ranged many leagues ahead of the main body of the tribe, keen senses honed and sharp, alert for the thud of pounding hooves, or the spoor of browsing game.

The only scout ahead of me was named Mungar, of an age with me, and a comrade in many a battle. Back to back we had fought a hundred times or more, against the great cats or the little men with poision darts, or the great, dim-witted reptiles of the swamp-country. Bold and fearless was he, and I could ask for no

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mightier warrior to fight by my side.

Thus, when I came to the foothills of the mountains beyond which lay the Valley of Akram the Mysterious and the Tower of Time, and when the dark forest thinned out in grassy hills, and I saw the ruins, I wondered that I had not heard the warning cry of Mungar on the wind ere now.

They were of stone, the ruins, and old beyond thought; cut and set and hewn in a fashion that roused me to marvel at them, for the folk of my homeland were ages yet from the mastery of such craft, and dwelt still in rude tents of scraped hide. What manner of men was it, I wondered, who reared up tents of stone? And where was Mungar, that he had not cried out his warning when he came upon this mystery?

Then I found him—or what was left of him—face down in a pool of blood, sprawled at the edge of the thinning trees. His powerful limbs were hacked and horribly mutilated; and his head was gone.

I squatted on my heels and studied the grassy turf. There were no tears, for it was not yet time for lamentation. It was time for revenge, and the simple yet solemn rites of the dead, and the sobbing of the women, and my own silent mourning—these were for later. First came vengeance.

I studied the turf with keen eyes, alert and thoughtful—and never the scholar of later ages read more into his page than I discerned from the text of the earth. They had set upon him from the cover of bushes, struck him down with slung missiles, then worked their gory savagery upon his dead or unconscious body.

He had not had the chance to stand and fight for his life. Like cowardly jackals, they had slunk in the bushes. There were seven of them in all had done this deed, and they were not men—all this, and more, my primitive senses read in the trampled grass, the crumpled leaf, the scraped bark and tree-mould.

Language is too weak a tool to describe the cold fury that seethed in my soul as I looked upon the pitiably mangled carrion that had been Mungar of the Vanir. Death was ever at our back in this grim age; fighting was a fact of life, and dying an event too common to be noted. But when we slew, it was cleanly and swiftly, and we did not mutilate our foes. The thing that had done this deed was more brutish than a beast, for even the beasts slay cleanly and without cruelty or insult to the fallen.

I began to track the killers of Mungar. I moved swiftly, as swift as I could, but keeping well to cover lest I myself be seen. The trail was easy to follow, for the slayers of Mungar had not paused to conceal their tracks. They were odd, those tracks—not like the tread of the Nordheimr, with their narrow, high-arched feet.

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These were the wide, flat, splay-footed feet of something more akin to the beasts than to true men. Yet beasts do not mutilate their kill senselessly. Neither do they carry off the head!

I cannot quite put into words the fury and depth of loathing Hengibar felt at the beheading of Mungar. The language lacks words to describe it. Perhaps it was that the men of lost and age-forgotten Nordheim felt that the whole body should be buried, so that the spirit might rise, whole and new and complete, into whatever vague Valhalla they dreamed for the afterlife. But the stealing of the head of a corpse was a shameful thing, and an insult to his spirit.

The trail led from the weed-grown ruins through the dim blue hills and into the mountains. I left the body where it lay. The tribe, which followed at my heels, would come upon it and give it decent burial. They would read my own tracks in the truf, and know whither I had gone—and why. And they would understand and follow.

It was not hard to follow the tracks of Mungar's killers. Their splay-footed prints lay clearly imprinted in the soft earth. The path wound between the hills and led deep into the mountains. Here and there I came upon traces of ancient fortifications and walls —fallen pillars, buried amidst the grass, and the foundations of long-vanished buildings. I prowled through the suburbs of an age-old city, although the man I then was could not know the word and would not have understood the concept.

Higher and higher into the mountains I climbed. I began to hear a weird whistling ahead of me and above me. Night fell, and I was still climbing. At moonrise I reached the highest point of the pass wherethrough ran the trail of the splay-footed killers; then it was that I found the source of the strange sound. Atop poles, driven upright into the earth, scores of naked human skulls were fastened. Holes had been knocked into them with fiendish cunning, and the wind that blew through their gaping eye-sockets and empty, grinning jaws made an eerie, uncanny song. My flesh crawled at the ghastly sight, but I did not falter in my pursuit.

Some hours after moonrise I emerged from the mountains onto steep slopes overlooking a broad and fertile valley. And then it was that I first beheld a city—or the remnants of one. For once, long ago, this valley had housed a high and mighty race. The ages had rolled over them, crushing them into the dust, but a shred or two of their grandeur yet lingered. The tumbled stones and fallen pillars I had passed at the forest's edge, and amidst the hills, were faint traces of what had been. But here, in the fertile, sheltered valley, several buildings yet stood. They were at once magnificent

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and uncouth, vast structures of age-old masonry, worn with the ages, but unfallen. And, as I soon discovered, still inhabited by the degenerate descendants of the once glorious race that had reared them when the world was young.

For there loped about the great portals of the magnificent piles of masonry a shambling and subhuman horde. Akin to the great apes they were, but something of reason kindled a spark of intelligence behind those furry visages and brutish brows. They were hunched and dwarfish, and dirty yellow skin showed bare between patches of wooly black fur, and their legs were bowed and splay-footed. They were like, and yet unlike, the apes of the jungle, for the beast may be ugly but there is a rightness to his form. But these were half-men, and their brutish attributes were like a deformity. There was no rightness to their ugliness, and I sensed without putting it into words that they were the decayed remnants of once-human stock. Had they been brutes, I could have hated them and would have fought them with a clean ferocity; but their sires had once been men, or something close to men, and I loathed them for the sickly taint of in-breeding and racial decay I sensed in their shambling, dwarfish kind.

But it was the city that seized my attention, not the things it housed. Once this had been the inner city, perhaps the central palace complex, and strong walls yet stood about the mighty structures, holding the wilderness at bay. I, who had never seen any habitation more sophisticated than the hide tents of my tribe, stared down and wondered at what I saw. For some time I stood struck dumb and speechless. For such a sight was beyond my wildest imagination and at first my mind refused to comprehend the towering piles of masonry and my dazed eyes could not absorb the marvel. Think, my civilized brothers, try to think just what the vision of stone walls and splendid palaces and soaring towers would be to a primitive of the Dawn whose only concept of a dwelling-place was yet limited to a leather tent, and whose highest dream of architecture was a mud hut with a thatched roof. Nothing in all my past experience or in the traditions of my race prepared me for such unimaginable splendor, for no man of my blood had even dreamed of carven walls of monolithic stone or spires that lifted against the glittering stars.

What could these magnificent structures be, but the palaces of the gods? The thought passed through the brain of Hengibar in that moment, and it is by his reactions, or by the lack of them, that I, James Allison, realize how remarakble a specimen of early man was this Hengibar of the Dawn. For the naked savage that once was I neither fell on his belly to grovel in worship, nor

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fled howling in superstitious fear. Confronted by that walled citadel, Hengibar reasoned that, men or gods, the murderers and mutilators of Mungar dwelt in those stony lairs, and the single purpose that burned in his breast bore the red name of Vengeance.

Clenching my stone axe in one mighty fist, I went down the mountain slope under the blazing stars and approached—with awe, but without fear—the frowning walls and age-old bastions of that fortress of mystery.

ONCE THERE HAD BEEN mighty gates of bronze or iron, but the ages had eaten them away and now it was emptiness that stretched between the pillars of the portal that broke the girdle of those great walls. The brutish half-men that were the dwindling remnant of that once-proud race had not bothered to patch the breech in the walls even with a wooden palisade, nor did they the guard the way that led within. And I felt contempt for them, for I, even Hengibar, even the primal savage who had never dreamed of walls or gates, even my quick wits could grasp the virtues and the uses of such protection. But the shambling cretins who slunk in the shadows of mighty ancestors of yore, they had sunken too far into brutehood; the feeble flicker of intelligence within their dim brains guttered like the flame of a candle in the wind. They could no longer even protect themselves. The best they could muster within them was to murder from ambush.

I glided through the shadows and the starlight, working my way deeper into the heart of what remained of the city. To every side I saw clear evidence of the decay of a brilliant race. The broad avenues were paven and lined with the statues of gods or kings or prophets—which I, the untutored savage, thought of as "men turned to stone." But unrestrained saplings had tilted the paving-stones awry, and the streets were ankle-deep in filth and refuse. Even the marble images were dilapidated, broken, grown with lichen, and when one fell from its niche or pedestal, it was never raised again.

Few dwelt in the ruinous palaces that were now reeking hovels, and the streets wherethrough I passed were empty. But ahead of me a straggling procession moved to the outskirts of the walled precinct, and I followed stealthily, the better to learn the secrets and spy out the weaknesses of my adversaries before I took my stand and slew. The brutish horde that slunk through the great boulevard stank of their filth, but a spark of mankind smouldered in their malformed bodies, for they wore scraps of clothing and a few bore about them the accouterments of war. Strange, strange it was, to see a polished gem flash among matted, tangled locks, or a gorget

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of carven gold clasped about the furred throat of a thing more close to beast then man! The scent of them was sour in my nostrils, and the squealing and grunting that served them for speech gibbered in my ears, and the skin crawled on my fore-arms while the short hair of my nape bristled with uncanny loathing, but I followed the loping, swinish horde, curious to discover their destination.

Beyond the streets and palaces, the wall lay fallen. Some conclusion of nature had shaken down the handiwork of the ancient race, and their beast-like descendants had not the will, or perchance the skill, to raise the great stones into place again. They flowed like an unclean tide of crawling things over the weed-grown blocks and down the slope of a hill to where a wandering stream, once an irrigation ditch, perhaps, but now a noisome sewer, wound its polluted way through neglected fields long overgrown. Here trees stood tall with the growth of careless generations, and beyond there rose a single tower that stood against the stars.

There was something odd about the soaring spire. Concealed behind a thick bole, Hengibar studied it with narrowed eyes while the prickling of premonition ran through his tense limbs. The starry light was dim, but the eyes of the man I once had been were sharp as whetted swords. And then I saw the mystery; for, whereas the wall and the many-towered citadels were old and worn with ages, the stones of this tower were fresh and new. Indeed, I could even see the marks of the masons' chisels, sharp as when they had been newly hewn. But why should this one structure be fresh-builded, when all else within this weird and mysterious valley slumped into crumbling decay?

A garden of strange flowers grew about the base of this lone spire, trim and well-tended. And this, too, was uncanny, for such as the loping horde I had followed to this place were too brutish to possess the skills. And one thing more there was about that lone, ominous minaret of fretted stone that roused strange forebodings within my naked breast. For a weird glamor clung about it like a cloak of woven starlight, forming a dimly-sensed and mystic barrier. Then through the tall, Gothic-arched door of the tower came a woman, and my heart ceased beating and my mind went numb and my eyes forgot all else and saw only her.

She was unlike anything I had ever seen or imagined, the Woman of the Tower, and unlike anything I had ever dreamed. The women of the Vanir or the Aesir are tall and majestic, full-breasted, wide-hipped, thick-haunched, with flesh like milk and long braided hair like woven gold or flame. But she was small, demure and slender, no taller than a child, with almond eyes of

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lambent emerald and soft sleek flesh the color of amber or honey. Her hair was a drifting banner of black silk and it poured about her slim shoulders so that she wore it like a cloak. Indeed, she wore no other garment, and her small, shallow, tip-tilted breasts peeped through the torrents of silken ebony, as did also her slim girlish thighs.

She was a thing of awe and wonder to the savage who then was I—diminutive, doll-like and fragile—an ageless mystery clung about her and glimmered in the emerald depths of her eyes. And, staring upon the graceful golden woman, her naked beauty half-hidden and half-revealed under the gliding falls of her night-black hair, Hengibar of the Dawn forgot in that instant all the women he had ever seen, all the women he had ever lusted for, and discovered the meaning of desire. Aye, desire flared up in his heart, pure and single and all-consuming as a perfection of the essence of flame.

She stood in the tall doorway, naked and graceful and swaying, and the squealing beast-men went down on their bellies before her. And him who had been in the very forefront of the shambling mob threw to her the bruised and gory thing he had borne all this way cradled in his arms. It was the severed head of Mungar. It fell amidst the strange, moon-pale flowers before her slim feet and she stooped and picked it up and held the bloody, battered thing, nestling it against her small, bare breasts. And then she ate of the disgusting thing, nibbling daintily with small teeth like sharply pointed pearls, and the soul sickened within the breast of Hengibar, where he stood amid the trees, faint and shaken with desire and, now, with disgust and loathing.

The worship or ritual or sacrifice—or whatever it was—was over. The half-men scrambled to their feet, and, turning about, slunk back to their fetid lairs in what had once been splendid palaces. From the shadows of the grove, Hengibar stood hidden in the gloom and watched them go. He did not pursue them. For he had found the thing he sought; he had found the center of their civilization, their leader or queen or goddess. He had but to slay her to destroy them, for he knew with a knowledge that went beyond conscious thought that the slender golden woman was the one thing that held them up, even so little a ways, above black howling bestiality. She it was, like a slim golden flame, who kept alive the dim spark of human intelligence that guttered yet within their brutish hearts. For the thing which sets man, even the savage, above the beast, is the ability to conceive of a being superior to himself. And with the image of the little golden woman ever before them, the half-men of the crumbling stone towers were,

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however less than man, still something more than brutes.

THE EAST FLUSHED with the pearly half-glow that dims the stars just before the coming of dawn. Like a shadow, silent as the gliding leopard, Hengibar crept from the gloom of the trees and approached the tower. At his coming, the pallid blossoms stirred fretfully in their sleep. Like pale-throated lilies they were, but their leaves were black and sparkling like some nameless and unfamiliar mineral. Whatever they were, they were other than flowers, for at Hengibar's approach they called shrilly in faint alarm, chiming like tiny bells.

Hengibar ignored the weird warning-music of the uncanny flowers. He stole across the unbarred threshold like a drifting wind and melted into the black, velvety gloom of a fluted, slender pillar which soared above him, its capital lost in darkness. Like the eyes of a great cat his gaze adjusted itself to the dimness, which was like a blue twilight. He stared about him, quick stabbing glances like dagger-thrusts, but saw no sign of danger. But his senses warned him that danger was hovering near—those razor-keen, unsleeping senses that had saved him ten thousand times from the cunning foeman or the fury of the wild.

All was strangeness and mystery, glimmering blue lights that bloomed and faded, dim and insubstantial like the ghosts of suns. Shadows that whispered of terrible and awesome things, but in voices that murmured too low for even his cat-clever ears to make out the words. There were old sorceries here, magics that had outlived the ages, and incantations made to gods who had died so long ago that even their names were forgotten by myth. He had felt the tingling shock of sorcery when he crept across through the unbarred portal. Suddenly he had stepped into a world apart, and the world outside was far away, remote, and somehow without meaning. It was as if this tower was built beyond the reach of time and that into this murmuring blue twilight, time could not come. Dawn would not break here, nor the slow hours pass, not years nor even centuries. For it seemed to him that this tower was a fortress builded against time and that the stones of these walls were strong enough to hold at bay the great heart-beat of the world, the unending rhythm of night and day, the slow cycle of the seasons. Like a mighty bastion, these walls stood unshaken by the lapse and fall of ages. The tower was like a grim lighthouse, whose foundations held firm against the suck and thunder of the pounding tides. But the floods that swirled and broke foaming about the strong foundations of this tower were the tides of time, and all who dwelt within were deathless, for here tomorrow came not, and

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it was yesterday forever.

She was waiting for him in a chair of dim lucent crystal which stood amidst the echoing vastness of her hall, and the fragile loveliness of her slim amber body burned like a naked flame through the hushed dusk of this timeless place. He came upon her suddenly, prowling like a hunting panther, and the shock of her tender, elfin beauty froze him with an intensity of desire such as he had never before known. The eternal mystery of woman glowed in her almond eyes, half-veiled in silken lashes; her soft, wet mouth awoke within him a raging lust stronger than any thirst; and the golden promise of her warm, tender flesh was tantalizing agony.

He stood, the heavy axe forgotten in his clenched fist, and stared into the emerald depths of her strange eyes. There flowed between them a wordless communication such as flows between a speechless beast and his mate—the fierce urge of desire, and the yielding warmth of surrender. Her eyes promised him many things beyond even the gift of her tawny, slender body: they promised him a place beside her on the crystal throne, and a godlike kingship over the squat, grovelling beast-men who yet lingered, fewer each century, in the husk of the dead city. It was she who had commanded that the city be built, and the remote ancestors of the shambling half-men had hewn the great stones from the heart of the mountains, cut them into shape with slow and patient toil, and lifted them into place, one by one. For she was Yavikasha, the Undying One, the last of her kind, the last of a race of sorcerers who had ruled the world in that forgotten age which lay between the doom of the great reptiles and the first dim stirrings of mankind in the womb of time. Aye, she and her forgotten race were other than true men, a sudden mutation of the early mammals, one of the many experiments of Nature which failed. For they could not breed true, and of their spawn would be born half-human monsters who died swiftly.

Many, oh many strange things the eyes of the golden witch on the chair of crystal whispered to his bemused brain as he stood there frozen in the grip of overmastering desire in that hall of shadows and silences, where blue lights waxed and waned. As if in recompense for their fruitless loins, Nature had given to her race uncanny mastery of occult forces, and they had bent these forces to the purpose of undying youth. But one by one had the golden people fallen prey to disease or madness or to the beasts, until only she had been left, alone and friendless—Yavikasha, who could never die!

From the first puny, scurrying anthropoids had she molded the race whose children had built the stone city; for ages had she ruled from her lonely throne a roaring

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wilderness world in whose savage wastes only this island of civilization stood against the bestial wild. In time, perhaps through unchecked in-breeding, the stock of her subjects had degenerated; and by now only the stunted and half-animal brutes were left to pay her their inarticulate homage. She had passed the ages in dreaming, while unknown to her, in the frosty womb of the north, Nature had experiemnted again, and true men had risen from brutehood—men who could breed and produce, not squalling, ghastly monsters, but—men!

With such as Hengibar, who could say but that her accursed and sterile loins might not yet issue forth the goldens sorcerers of lost ages? Could not they become the father and mother of a race reborn, into whose eager hands she would pass the secrets of forgotten sorcery she had guarded all this while? And even if not, even if Nature had set her inscrutable and unalterable will against the continuance of that dead, forgotten race, still he and she could rule here forever, immortal and undying, while the earth endured. . .

He was strongly tempted, was Hengibar the Wanderer, Hengibar of the Dawn, the golden-haired Aesir who had been rescued from the wild by the tribe of Wolfang. And who would not be tempted? Even I, the James Allison of today who was once that stalwart savage of the dawn, felt my feeble manhood stir and quicken at the memory of that slim, tawny body, half-hidden and half-revealed beneath the fall of night-black hair.

Then she smiled, soft lips parting to reveal small, strong, even teeth like sharply pointed pearls—and there arose within the memory of Hengibar the terrible sight of those small teeth nibbling at the gory, battered head of Mungar as a woman nibbles a ripe fruit. And there rose within his breast another memory as well—that of grim Wolfang, the Vanir chieftain who had found an Aesir babe naked in the forest, and had spared him for his strength and courage, and the promise of the man he could become. That same Wolfang who still lived, grey and grizzled as an old wolf, hoary with years—whose son lay sprawled like a butchered hog amidst a puddle of gore—the son whose mutilated head was nought to Yavikasha but a morsel of fresh meat!

His blue eyes flashed with cold fires, like an Arctic dawn mirrored in Arctic ice. The paralysis that sapped his will faded and he strode up to the crystal throne, looked once on the tawny body that was tender and warm and bare beneath the glossy tides of black and silken hair—and smote her head from her body with the blade of his mighty axe! Hot blood—blood that was thin and golden and in no wise human—besplattered him from head to

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foot. He bent and wiped his body clean, using handfulls of the black, silken hair for that purpose. But he did not look at the beautiful thing that lay at his feet, undulating slowly in the death-spasm. It died slowly, as a snake dies, even after you have severed its head. But die it did at last, and, like a dying serpent that stings with poisoned fangs the heel that crushed it, so had the golden thing set its fangs in him, and the poison had entered and frozen his heart. For Hengibar had looked upon the naked beauty of Yavikasha the Undying One, and never more while he lived would he look upon the women of his race save with coldness and distaste.

And I, who wore the name of Hengibar then and who wear the name of James Allison today, and who gaze down upon this strange scene from the dim and unborn future, feel a strange thought stirring within me. She was the last of her sorcerous race, was Yavikasha, and he was among the first of his: did the memory of that weird confrontation between witch and warrior linger on for countless ages in myth and legend, to become the prototype of the legend of Jason, the glorious young warrior, and Medea, the witchwoman? And that choice she offered him there, in that place of misty lights and whispering shadows, that chance to rule beside her, immortal and undying, but with every century that passed, more cruel and evil and despicable—the choice he spurned!—does it, too, live on in legend, and did she become in time Lilith, that shadowy first wife of Adam?

And the mystic figure of the beautiful and seductive woman given to dark and loathsome appetites—did that, too, live and does it live today as the vampire and lamia of legend?

Who can say? But who can say it does not? I, who have peered further than any other down the corridors of time, to witness strange scenes of a forgotten yesterday, know that there is a dark, uncanny truth behind many of the legends of my race.

But I must finish with the story of Hengibar the Wanderer, Hengibar of the Dawn, who, when kingship and godhood and immortality were offered to him, remembered a kindness done a naked babe by a savage and merciless warrior, spurned the offer and slew the beautiful vampire-thing that made it; I must finish, for I tire, my wasted hand can no longer bear up the pen, that hand, that in other ages and in forgotten times could wield so tirelessly the heavy axe!

He turned away when once the thing was truly dead, and sought the clean and wholesome world again. Already about him the tower was changing—changing! The shadows were whispering no more, nor went the strange blue lights drifting to and fro. And the

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sharp, fresh-cut stones of the portal were already flaking to dust as he stepped forth into a golden dawn.

The flowers were already dead, the moon-pale lilies with dark, glittering leaves, that had sung a thin song of warning at his approach. Already the stench of rottenness rose from them, for the age-old spell that for so many ages had held time at bay had broken when the sorceress was slain, and time was swift to take its due, so very long delayed. Behind him the tower was crumbling into dust—the crash of falling masonry was loud in his ears—but louder still, and far more welcome, was the familiar clash and roar of battle from the wall-girt palaces beyond the trees, where the warriors of Wolfang were busy reaping a red and terrible vengeance—a vengeance that would leave the Valley of Akram a dead waste.

A smile lightened his grim lips as he turned his face towards the city and sped to join his brothers in the red business of revenge. They could not know that already had he, Hengibar, taken that vengeance for them, and that in one hand he bore like a grisly fruit the severed and seamed and age-shrunken head of Yavikasha. The withered, mummified thing he would lay at the feet of Wolfang, and the uncanny and marvelous tale would be told, and the mutilated corpse of Mungar would be laid to rest in a fitting manner. But first there was a deal of killing to be done!

But somberness dwelt in the heart of Hengibar, even as he turned his face towards the battle. For although he bore away the head of Yavikasha the Undying, he had left his own heart behind him there in the Tower of Time, and he knew that the future would be an empty one for a man who loves the dead.

—Robert E. Howard
& Lin Carter

ON SALE NOW IN MAY AMAZING

TED WHITE'S OUTSTANDING NEW NOVELET, UNDER THE MAD SUN, GEORGE R. R. MARTIN'S, NIGHT OF THE VAMPYRES, BRIAN M. STABLEFORD'S THE ENGINEER AND THE EXECUTIONER, RACHEL COSGROVE PAYE'S THE NAME OF THE GAME, GEORGE ZEBROWSKI'S THE CLIOMETRICON, MICHAEL GERARD'S ALL ALONE AND FEELING BLUE, KEN WISMAN'S DOMINION. ALL STORIES NEW AND COMPLETE. DON'T MISS IT.

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LAURA'S THEME

Jay Haldeman's last appearances in these pages were "What I Did On My Summer Vacation" (July, 1973) and "Ghang Bhang" (November, 1973). Now, after time out to chair the 1974 World Science Fiction Convention, he returns with an ambitious new work in which we meet a mysterious woman named Laura. . .

JACK C. HALDEMAN II

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

IT HAD BEEN over a year since he last walked down the street. It seemed more like a century. Things change so quickly in the city. He stopped in front of a flower shop. The flowers that had been so carefully set in the window were overlayed by the city traffic reflected in the plate glass. An insubstantial reflection of himself was superimposed over a wreath that read *bon voyage* on a ribbon more cheerful than he felt. He brushed his sandy hair back out of his eyes and thought of flowers cut to look at, to die there, their severed stems straining for food and getting only tap-wafer. Changed twice daily. He bent down, picked up a brick and threw it into the window, feeling somewhat surprised that the window just seemed to sigh and collapse, reflections splitting and falling apart, large sheets of glass sliding ever so slowly down to fold, shatter and crash at his feet, sending a shower of fragments across his legs. He felt sharp little shiny slivers of glass brush his face, settle into his boots, collect in a dusty pile at his feet. Rubbing his fingers together he felt the dust and chips roll around, digging into his skin. He reached through the window and tore the banner from the overturned wreath, throwing it out into the street. Poor plants. People plants whose lives had been turned and shaped for somebody else's enjoyment. His tears mingled with his blood as he climbed into the storefront, opening another large gash as he brushed against the remaining glass still hanging in the polished aluminum frame. He sat down lotus-style and faced the street, staring blankly beyond the frozen people, beyond the frozen city. As he slowly bled to death, he thought of Laura.

"WHAT ABOUT IT?" The voice startled him, snapping him out of

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the intricate piece of dialog he had been weaving.

"What about what?" Fred swiveled away from the typewriter.

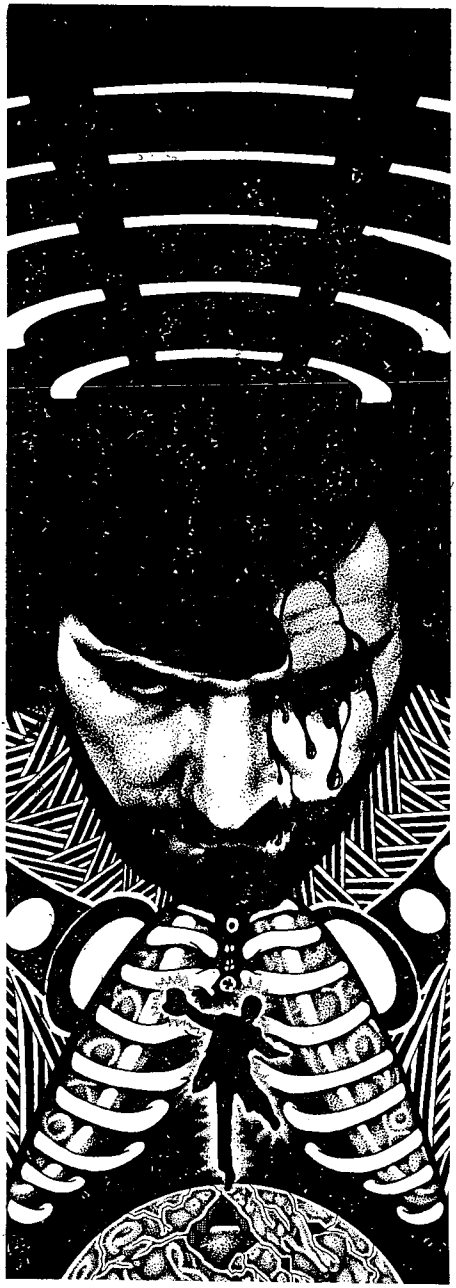
"You know. The party. It's almost eight."

Gloria climbed from the bed, stretching her arms first above her head and then behind her back. For a minute he almost considered going to the party or pinning Gloria underneath him on the bed but what the hell he had to finish this section before he lost the thread.

"I don't know. I have stuff to do." He reached for a glass of forgotten Coke that was sitting on his desk. It had been sitting for a long time and the ice had melted, leaving a layer of clear water above the brown Coke. He swirled it, mixed it. It tasted flat and warm. He looked over the lip of the glass to watch her.

She stood by the edge of the bed, cut in half by the curving rim of the glass that had small bits of dried cookie around the edge. Fred wondered what would happen if she went to the party without him. Would she come back? He wasn't sure that he would miss her too much if she didn't. She had only been living with him for a few days and although their relationship was good, there were no real strong ties. Fred couldn't remember if she had any of her stuff in the apartment.

"Laura will be here soon. Are you coming?" Gloria bent over,



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slipping her small breasts into the bra and reaching behind her to hook it. He smiled. He didn't know many girls who wore bras.

"Laura?"

"You know Laura. She's been around for awhile." She pulled a sweat shirt over her head. John Lennon smiled at him from her chest.

"I don't think I'll go. Too much to do."

"Okay. But look, can I take a couple of your poems? There's someone I'd like to show them to."

"They're pretty bad." He watched her root through a pile of dirty clothes, looking for some jeans.

"No, no. Some of them are really good." She dug out an old pair of jeans and slipped them on. Bra, but no underpants. He decided he *would* miss her if she didn't come back.

"I guess I have a couple things here." He rummaged through a cardboard box next to his desk. The faded printing on the side read I.W.HARPER and he had written "Poetry, Garbage and Other Shit" on the side with a black magic marker that had squeeked and smelled funny before it dried out.

"These are my only copies. Take care of them, will you?"

There was a knock on the door and she tossed "Sure, I won't lose them or anything," over her shoulder as she stepped around the trash towards the door.

She opened the door until i caught on the chain.

"Hi," Gloria said, peering around the edge of the door.

"Hi," came the soft voice fron the other side.

"Hello Fred," greeted Laura a she was let into the room.

Fred nodded, realizing that h recognized her. She was one o the faceless ones who were alway around, always someone else' friend.

"Ready to go?"

"Fred's not going, but I'm al set," said Gloria.

"So long. See you later," Fred said to the closing door, realizing that he hadn't gotten a good lool at Laura's face and wasn't sure that he could really recognize her pick her out in a crowd. There are people like that.

He turned back to his type writer and settled down for th evening.

The phone woke him as he dozed in the chair. With a star he realized he must have been asleep for quite awhile, the morning sun was streaming in the window He glanced at the clock above the stove. It was 7:30.

"Hello?"

"Fred? This is Laura."

"Who? Oh, yes. What's happening?"

"There's trouble. Gloria's in jail."

"What?"

"She was busted last night. Had some stuff with her."

"Shit! Grass?"

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"No, hard stuff. It's going to be ough."

"Damn it, I told her never—"

"Watch it Fred, they may have our phone tapped."

"Me? Why? How did they—"

"Your poems. Gloria had some of your poems with her when hey grabbed her. They had your ame and address on them. Drug oems, weren't they?"

"Well, yes."

"They must be watching you. Be careful. I've got to run, there's a car that keeps driving by the hone booth."

"But—"

Click

Fred jumped from his chair, ending it flying out behind him. He went to the door and threw he two extra bolts across the rame. Nail it shut? No, that vouldn't do. None of this would lo any good. They wouldn't waste ny time crashing through the loor.

Stumbling over his feet, he unged over to the kitchen area nd grabbed the marijuana stuffed lastic bag behind the cereal helf. Get rid of everything. He natched up a knife and pryed the aseboard away from the wall be- ind the sofa. He removed nother plastic bag filled with white powder.

He dumped everything into the oilet, watched it float around, tick to the sides. Turning to the nedicine cabinet, he opened the nirrored door that had a faded eace decal in one corner and the local poison control number in another. Bottles. Pills. Some legal, most not. He took two of the red ones and emptied the rest down the toilet. He depressed the little chrome lever and felt his life spinning round and around with the swirling water.

BOB WAS A STUDENT, a slightly overweight professional student who was just barely smart enough to keep his ass hidden in the large state university. As long as his grades remained just where they were, he would stay in school until he finally graduated with a nondescript degree he would never use. His father ran a moderately successful hardware store in Tulsa and he would probably, even after all the arguments, take over the business. Right now, life was just as he wanted it. Very few demands were placed on him, and no responsibilities. He usually sat around the frat house drinking beer.

His large, clumsy feet were propped up on the coffee table pointing toward the color TV. He was watching the Dating Game. He liked it. He especially liked it when the contestants said dumb things and embarrassed themselves. He set his beer down.

"Hey, Big Bob. When're you going to get ready?" George had come in, grabbing a beer from the ice filled tub on his way. He snapped off the tab top, carefully holding it at arm's length, aiming the spray at Bob.

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"What the hell? Lay off, would ya? I'm moving, I'm moving."

"You'd better. We've got to pick the girls up in an hour."

"Keep your pants on, Georgie boy. You act like you've never been on a blind date before."

"Sandy said she was a real winner. I hope so, I'm horny as hell."

Bob thought of Sandy, his regular girl. He hoped the date she had lined up for George wouldn't cramp his style.

Bob showered and shaved. The electric shaver seemed to polish his chin as well as remove the stubble he had been accumulating since yesterday. He took great pains to trim his sideburns, making sure they were exactly the same length. The aftershave lotion stung him slightly, fighting for dominance over the equally aromatic deodorant. He put off getting dressed as long as he could. He liked to watch the underclassmen flush as he walked around naked. Let them see what a really hung stud looks like.

Carefully he chose the proper clothes and rounded up George who was hazing some new pledges. They put the top down on his Pontiac convertible and went to pick up the girls.

Sandy was waiting in front of the sorority house when they drove up. She was tall, with long, straight hair and she carried herself in shorts as stiffly as if she was wearing formal clothes. George's date was waiting with her.

It was a long drive out to the dry riverbed that Bob's fraternity used for its beer parties and it grew dark before they arrived. Bob took a swig every now and then from a silver flask he carried in the glove compartment. As usual, Sandy made her token complaint. As usual, he ended the short conversation by proclaiming that he drove better half-drunk than most people did sober. It was a well-used discussion. They had been through it many times before and each knew their lines perfectly.

Bob was pleased to see in his rear view mirror that George's date was working out nicely. They huddled close together in the wind-washed back seat and Bob smiled, filing the girl away in his mind as another possible replacement when things got tough with Sandy.

The riverbed was lit by several small bonfires. There were kegs of beer sitting iced in galvanized tubs around tables covered with food. A large crowd of people stood around and there were huddled shapes in the shadows.

It turned out to be a pretty good party, lots of drinking and laughing. Sandy got drunk and after they screwed in the darkness of the heavy weeds, she passed out.

Several uncounted beers later, Bob was feeling no pain at all as he nearly stumbled over George and his date. They were sleeping on a blanket away from the

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crowd. He woke the girl with a soggy kiss. Her eyes were blurry as she woke up. She only smiled as he slipped his hands under her sweater and things, so he laid her. George never woke up.

The sun was coming up as they drove back home. Sandy was sick several times and more bitchy than usual. Bob found that he needed to pull out the flask to stay awake, keep the car on the road.

From the back seat, George's girl smiled at him in the mirror. George's hand was on top of her left breast and he was asleep, head hanging over the rear of the seat. Bob drove faster.

"Slow down, for Christ's sake," muttered Sandy.

Bob checked his rear view mirror. The girl's eyes were flashing in the morning sun. She seemed to like speed. He took another drink from the flask.

The resulting crash was pictorial enough to be featured on the front page of several local papers. Only three bodies were found. The police, after extensive questioning, were able to uncover only that the missing girl's name was Laura, a fact we have noted.

ASSORTED POINTS of information that may or may not have some bearing on the issue, as selected from diverse sources including the author's diary, the Koran and the trash can behind Ames Hall..

a) While it is not true that Laura once danced in the chorus line in an old Busby Berkeley extravaganza,

b) it is true that she once modeled for a Rosie the Riveter poster. It was never used.

c) She has regular periods and seldom has trouble moving her bowels.

d) She often chooses to look young, as she is somewhat concerned over her advancing years.

e) She has times of mental confusion, which is normal. She gets over them, which is not normal.

f) She writes pornography under an interesting assortment of pen names.

g) Sometimes, on perfectly clear days, she can be seen driving a Volkswagen bus recently painted mauve that has a pair of bronzed baby shoes clanking from the rear view mirror. She found the shoes in a dump in North Tarrytown, New York and had them bronzed in Camden, New Jersey on a Tuesday afternoon of no particular significance.

h) She has holes in her openwork.

i) Choose this if none of the above are correct within ten percent.

FRED BALANCES on the edge of his chair, barely breathing, waiting only for the inevitable knock on the door. It has to come, it is only a matter of time. He has visions of the police breaking down the door with one of those obscenely large axes, charging inside, grabbing him. Why is he afraid to

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leave his apartment?

Still no news about Gloria. Is she still in jail? Why haven't they picked him up yet? Why should it take so long? Just a simple arrest, just the rest of his life down the drain.

Thank God for Laura. If not for her weekly visits he would have starved to death a long time ago.

He stares at the loaf of bread on the table. It has mold on it. Food is no good if he forgets to eat it.

He gets up from his chair and walks to the wall. He bends down and prys the lid off a can of interior wall paint, not noticing nor caring what color it is. Today he will paint the wall again. It is something to do.

He has been painting the wall for months, ever since Gloria was arrested and he stopped going outside. It is a visual riot of overlapping colors splashed one on top of the other. Layers and layers of paint. It makes a strange pattern.

The wall is a poem, one of his better ones.

He is not interested in the wall as such, but mainly with the reaction the police will have when they break in.

He often imagines how the scene will go. He acts out the parts:

"Crash!" he shouts. The sound of the door caving in under extreme force.

He assumes a crouching position with his back to the door, playing one of the policemen. His right forefinger is extended, becoming a gun. There is something wrong. His finger is too long for a 38 caliber Police Special. It is inconsistant.

"Get him," he says to his imaginary companion.

He leaps over to another position in the room.

"Wait," he says, assuming the identity of the second policeman. "Look. Over there. The wall."

He runs over to the chair he will undoubtably be sitting in when they come to arrest him. It is time for him to play himself.

He stands. His mouth opens, closes. His jaws move up and down but no sound comes out. How to justify the wall? He can never think of what to say. It is always the same, every time he acts it out. He always fails when this part of the play unfolds. Something is wrong. Must art be spontaneous? Why can't he plan this all out, get all the lines down pat?

He decides, for maybe the thousandth time, that he should paint the wall black. Maybe he will, this time. He has done it before. The absence of art is easier to explain.

Laura will understand.

THE TRIAL promises to be short. A simple breaking and entering, three juveniles arrested on the spot, all participants black. The case is open and shut and the judge leans back in his chair with a matchstick hanging from the

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corner of his smiling lower lip.

"The defendants will approach the bench." Sounds of chains. Three bound young men come foreward, flanked by two overweight policemen with shotguns.

"You'all have anything else to say before this Sovereign State passes judgment on you?" The judge leans forward, settles back, complacent.

There is no reply. Outside the small building there are birds singing in the trees, children making noise in the playground. One of the prisoners is continually clicking his fingernails, biting his lower lip. The judge's chair creaks in the quiet room as he rocks back and forth.

"Very well," continues the judge. "By the authority vested in me by the fine, law-biding people of this state, I find you guilty of all charges and sentence you each to ten years at hard labor." A smile spreads slowly across his face.

The man in the middle cries out and starts to fall to his knees. He is supported in a half slump by the chains binding him to the others. The guards take one step forward, their shotguns raised.

The prisoner on the left takes a half step forward, is pulled slightly sideways by the weight of the one in the middle. Tears are running down his face.

"Sir. . . Your Honor, sir." He is sobbing, choking.

"What is it?"

"We were waiting."

"What?"

"We were waiting. She never came back."

"What? Who never came back?"

"The girl. She never came back. She promised." He is speaking in gulps between sobs behind tears.

"What girl, damnit!"

"Laura."

The room is suddenly deadly quiet and the word bounces off the walls, echoes for awhile and then grows tired, fades out and leaves the frozen scene.

"WHAT—"

"Yes?"

"What I mean to say is—"

"Go on."

"I would if you'd let me."

"Sorry. Please continue."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"What I mean to say is. . . Uh, I mean. . . Shit, it slipped my mind.

"Would you move your leg?"

"Huh?"

"It's hurting me."

"Oh, sure."

"That's better. Thank you."

"You're welcome."

IT WAS GOING to be a second honeymoon. The first one had not started things off very well and ten years and three unloved kids later their relationship had finally reached the breaking point.

The last honeymoon had been to the Poconos in a tinsel covered

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cottage. This was to be a new start and as the Shenandoah mountains stretched their smokey way off into the distance, John shifted the pack on his back.

"How much further is it?" asked Peggy.

"Not too far. According to that Park Ranger it's about a mile and a half to the stream. The cabin ought to be about a quarter mile on the other side."

"We'll make it before dark, won't we? I couldn't stand being out here in the dark with all those bears and God-knows-what-else."

"If you quit dragging your ass, we'll get there a lot faster," John replied, kicking a small stone over the edge of the path and watching it roll, bounce and disappear.

"I'm going as fast as I can, damnit."

"Shut up and keep moving," said John, his mind still on the stone, automatically responding to her meaningless words with worthless phrases worn smooth around the edges during the last ten years.

How *many* wasted words there had been; how *many* wasted years. Once there had been promise and now there was only entrapment. How different things could have been if he had only taken another path ten years ago.

He plodded onward.

She plodded onward.

They were bathed in silence as the wind and trees watched their unsteady progress with detached interest.

It was dusk when they reached the stream and by the time they finally saw the cabin, it had been dark for over an hour.

"There's someone inside," John said.

"What?" asked Peggy, no longer trying to keep the dull tiredness from her voice.

"There's somebody in the cabin. I can see a lantern inside."

"So what? The cabins are for anyone to use, right?" replied Peggy.

"I was hoping. . .", His voice trailed off and the crickets stepped in to fill the silence.

As they got closer they could see shadows dancing in the windows of the cabin as someone moved around inside. A girl walked over and stood silhouetted in the doorway, watching their approach.

"Hello there," she called out.

"Hi," said John, reaching the front of the cabin and dropping his pack on the ground outside the door. Peggy was still struggling up the slope.

"We didn't expect to find anyone else up here this late in the season," he said, trying to get a look at the girl and being half-blinded by the bright lantern behind her.

"I like it here in the fall. It's beautiful when the leaves are changing." Her voice was warm in the chill air.

"Hello," said Peggy, arriving out of breath.

"You're tired," said the girl.

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"We've been on the trail all day."

"You'll stay here tonight, of course."

"We wouldn't want to impose," said John, "but it's miles to the next cabin and we don't have a tent."

"No trouble at all." The girl turned sideways and her hair flared in the light. "Would you like some coffee? Please come in." She stepped back into the cabin and John and Peggy followed her.

Inside, the cabin was no different than the hundreds of others that had been built by the forest service during the depression to provide the double duty of giving people work and serving campers. They dot the Appalachain trail throughout the East like bird droppings.

"My name's Laura." said the girl, her back towards them, preparing coffee on a Coleman stove.

"John and Peggy Rifton," said John, looking around the room for signs of Laura's husband or boy friend. There was only one sleeping bag spread out on the bunk, one knapsack leaning against the table.

"Here," she said, handing them two styrofoam cups of coffee. The steam was tendrils in the suddenly still air.

"Thanks," said Peggy. "Where do you want us to put our sleeping bags? It's been a long day."

"Anywhere is fine," said Laura. "Make yourselves at home."

John sat at the table and sipped the hot coffee while his wife laid out the sleeping bags.

"Do you come out here often in the fall? Alone?" asked John.

"Almost every year. It's so peaceful being by myself out here in the mountains."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Of what?" She sat down across the table from him.

"Well, you know. A girl alone and everything. Anything could happen."

She laughed abruptly and a strange sparkle lit somewhere behind her eyes.

"I can take care of myself." Again the short, chopped laugh. "Besides, there's hardly anyone here."

"The only other person we've seen all day was a Forest Ranger."

"That's what I mean. There's no one here."

John finished his coffee and stood up to stretch. Peggy was already fast asleep in her sleeping bag. Her cup of coffee untouched, still full and now cold, was on the floor beside her.

"Would you like to see my deer?" asked Laura.

"Huh?"

"They come around every night about this time."

"Sure." John got up from the table.

Together they walked down a path behind the cabin to a small clearing. Laura held John's arm as they walked and he began to get a hollow feeling in his stomach.

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"You're not happy, are you?" asked Laura as they sat down to wait for the deer.

"What do you mean?" His hands were growing cold and sweaty.

"You and Peggy. I can sense things like that. Big problems, right?" Her hand was resting lightly on his leg and sympathy colored her voice a deep purple.

"Well. . ." he began, and all the years of frustration and bitterness started tumbling out. He talked and talked and she reinforced him for what seemed like hours. All the years with a wife who didn't understand what he was trying to do were caught up in the moment of a friendly voice, a gentle caress.

The deer stood silently by, forgotten.

She would grasp points before they were fully formed in his own mind. She seemed to intuitively understand the whole situation. He wondered how this beautiful person could have existed all these years while he had been wasting so much time.

They made love on a bed of pine needles and it was just as he had imagined it would be —perfect, with all the right words and motions. Afterwards they laid back and watched the stars plot their lazy paths across the crystal night. The cool breeze brushed across his naked body and somehow he wasn't cold.

"It could happen, you know," she said.

"What could happen?" The belt of Orion had captured his attention.

"You and me. We could have a good thing together."

"But Peggy—"

"In the wilderness there are dangers for those who aren't careful." Laura's eyes turned from the stars to stare deeply into his. Her eyes were deep pools bottomless.

"I don't know. There are so many things. . ."

"You have already made up your mind. I can tell."

"But—"

"Sleep on it. Tomorrow things will be clearer." She smiled and traced a line down the side of his face with her finger.

When he got back to the cabin and crawled into the sleeping bag with his wife all he could think of was how long it had been since he had felt so good and how the years had hardened Peggy from the soft little girl she had once been and when he absently brushed her body it was with his thoughts on Laura and when he slept there were dreams of chains breaking.

After breakfast it was decided that since Laura was familiar with the immediate area, they would spend the day exploring the nearby mountains with her before they moved along.

Peggy was still stiff and sore from the hike the day before so they decided to climb one of the nearer mountains, so as not to have to walk so far.

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"It will be an accident," whispered Laura in John's ear while they were getting ready to go. John was confused, dizzy, everything seemed blurry, out of focus. He wasn't sure what was happening, he only knew that this strange girl who had walked into his life less than 24 hours ago was taking charge of his life. He felt helpless. Everything was out of control. He drank several cups of coffee, but things didn't get any clearer. He grew more nervous.

As they walked up the slope of the mountain to the more difficult, steeper part, John was aware that Peggy and Laura were talking. He couldn't concentrate long enough to make any sense out of what they were saying. It seemed to be normal girl talk. Laura winked at him and things jerked further out of focus.

They paused for lunch about a third of the way up the mountain, perching on a jutting ledge that overlooked the valley below. There were so many places to lose your footing around here and so far to fall. The valley swam in blurry, liquid circles below him. He knew someone was saying something to him. but he couldn't focus his thoughts. He grunted and the voices stopped.

They finished eating and started on the most difficult part of the climb. Laura assured them that once they reached the peak there would be an easy way down on the other side.

Out of the blur, a tableau:

They are climbing on a narrow path with a sheer drop of several hundred feet on their right. Peggy is temporarily in front. John is behing her and Laura is behind him. She is whispering in his ear.

"Now," she whispers.

The chains snap inside John and he reaches forward and pushes Peggy whose feet scramble on the loose stones and she loses her footing and whirls around, off balance, leaning over the edge. Her eyes are wide open with fear and surprise and they lock with his and years together flash by instantly as she topples over the edge with a long, drawn out piecing scream that only stops as her body is crushed on the rocks below.

John turns to Laura behind him, but she is gone and he sees only the Forest Ranger walking carefully towards him, his pistol drawn.

GLORIA. LAURA. G times L, raised to the forth power and divided by three. Vector analysis. Interactions.

Strange. This street, Changes, changes, changes. Where was I when time brought all these changes? Growing old? Growing scared. I can remember streets of my youth, many were not paved and the dust would settle in my clothes, collars turning brown, and my mouth—yes, grit in growing teeth. This street, as it is now, is much too transient.

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There are many transient things, people. Empty faces plod past me. Blue. Uniform. Fear! Why? GloriaGloriaGloria. Had to leave. Red gasoline can. Wall a wall of flame. Art imitates life.

Things are slipping away from me. It is hard to keep anything straight.

Everything is hollow, transparent. People, cars lack substance; I can see through them. Me, them, me again, flowers. There are spatial relationships being expressed here, but I cannot quite grasp them. There are transparent walls around me; between me and everything else. I suspect the walls may have stronger ties to reality than the things they keep away from me.

Bon voyage. How strangely out of place. The flower's trip nearly over. Who are they dying for? Some elderly couple *their trip over too* standing in their stateroom with a few friends. Drinks before departing. Don't forget the dramamine. Standing in tap-water. Why is it that some things have to end in order to start other things? Why must we be so destructive?

It feels cool in my hand, its edges are rough and one corner is chipped off. Heavy, it has weight and substance. My hand is strangely light after one sidearm toss. I flex my fingers.

Red shift—blue shift. Slow, so slow, I can feel the walls coming down. Significance. There are truths here, things to be learned. There are musical notes sliding down scales in my mind, harmonics tumbling over each other, flashes of pointed light swimming around me. I am one with them, they enter my body. I no longer feel alone.

But the flowers, poor flowers; they have no one. They are dying for unfathomed reasons. Must their deaths be so trite? There *must* be purpose. I will enter their world and share their point of view.

I toss the *Bon voyage* ribbon out to float upon the sea of faces and open mouths in front of me. A gesture. Somehow it seems important.

There is reason, purpose. It is up to me to put it all in the proper framework. The facts must fit together.

I stare at the frozen faces. Here and there an iceburg of snowtopped hair. Seat myself. Meditate.

I am sitting in a pool of throbbing red blood. This too must mean something. There are common points.

There is Laura.

—JACK C. HALDEMAN II

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had attended one of the Milford conferences. (Harlan Ellison's introduction to Robin's story in *Again, Dangerous Visions* is worth reading, in this regard.) The Milford Conference, originally organized by James Blish and Damon Knight, in Milford, Pa., was an intense weekend or more each year in which professional sf writers criticized each others' work-in-progress. Robin felt the concept could be applied to beginning writers.

Robin's idea was to bring together twenty or so novice writers for six weeks, with established science fiction pros to lecture and guide them. The beginners would live together in a dorm, taking no other courses. Each morning, the group would meet. The visiting pro (each pro would be there for one week) might lecture, but more often than not, the entire group, beginners, Robin, and pro alike, would go through stories written by the novices, criticizing. In order to make it easier for students to attend, they could register for two-week periods, although they were strongly urged to be there for the entire six-week period. This idea of a beginning writers' workshop was, to the best of my knowledge, unique; it certainly had not been done before in the field of science fiction.

I signed up for the middle two weeks of that first workshop, and a brief description of my experiences will give an idea of how the workshops worked.

I originally learned of the workshop in *If's* listing of conventions and sf-related meetings. I had been reading science fiction since 1952 (primarily *Galaxy*), had been writing original stories since third grade, and had a bachelor's degree in mathematics before going to work as a computer systems programmer at Goddard Space Flight Center. Despite all this, all of my stories had been mainstream. I wanted to write scienc fiction, but was unable to. I went to Clarion in order to find out why I couldn't write sf.

When I arrived on Sunday afternoon, Robin gave me a sheaf of Xeroxed stories, the previous week's output by the particpants. I met Judy Merril, who had been there the second week and had decided to stay until Tuesday. A couple of hours later, the third week's pro, Fritz Lieber, arrived. The commotion of his arrival (this was just after the final installment of his serial, *A Spectre is Haunting Texas*, had been published in *Galaxy*) made writing and reading difficult, to say the least. Yet, somehow, I not only found time to read the manuscripts Robin had given me, but I also managed to write a story that evening. (I have had no trouble writing sf since then—in fact, I now have trouble writing mainstream stories. I never did find out why I was unable to write science fiction until then.)

We were all living in an old dormitory, Becht Hall. The first floor had two porches, where the participants congregated to loaf and watch the frisbee-players, a large lounge, and a suite of rooms where the visiting pros stayed. (While Judy Merril was there, Fritz stayed in a room on the men's floor.) The four or five girls in the workshop stayed on the second floor, while the men were on the third floor. There were no other students in the dorm. The sound of typewriters was heard most of the time from someone's room, and that was an excellent prod to the rest of us.

At nine o'clock the next morning, we met in a classroom, all twenty students seated in a circle, with Robin and Fritz at one end. (Judy Merril

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spent her extra two days swimming and enjoying herself.) I can't remember exactly what happened that first day, but we usually spent three hours each morning, criticizing manuscripts. Robin would pick one of the stories that he felt was worthy of criticism, either because it illustrated a flaw many of us were falling into or because it illustrated something we could all learn from, then we would go in a counter-clockwise circle, beginning at the student to Robin's right, everyone commenting on what they liked and what they disliked in the manuscript, until finally Robin and Fritz finished off the criticism. Sometimes, however, Robin would pick on someone who had offered little criticism. Sometimes, however, Robin would pick on someone who had offered little criticism up until then to start the criticism, shutting out those of us who always had four or five not-always-cogent things to say. Although not every manuscript turned in was criticized by the entire group, Robin and the visiting pro would give their copies, with criticisms noted on it, to the student. Robin tried to make sure that everybody had at least one manuscript criticized by the entire group.

The following week, Harlan Ellison arrived. (I knew nothing about the mystique of Harlan Ellison at that time and had, for some reason, pictured him as a meek little bookkeeper-type. Well, at least I was right about the "Little" aspect of Harlan.) Harlan was a slavedriver, requiring a story every day, usually around some particular theme or aspect of storywriting. The first story of mine that Harlan read, "Fountain of Force" (later rewritten somewhat by George Zebrowski and published in *Infinity Four*), was the only hard-science story in the bunch, so he required the rest of the workshop to write hard science stories for the next day. He made me write a story with people in it. The next week Damon Knight and Kate Wilhelm (Mrs. Damon Knight) arrived with their three-year-old son Jonathan, and sweetness and light reigned.

That's pretty much the way the workshop ran and, as Glen indicated, it worked: over half of the students did sell stories. However, what Glen failed to mention was that several of us had sold before. I had sold a mainstream story and an article on astronomy before coming to Clarion, as well as having several other mainstream stories published without pay in little magazines. Patrick Meadows, who attended the first workshop, had already sold several stories to *F&SF*, and Phyllis MacLennan, who attended the second workshop in 1969 (the one Glen had attended), also had sold several stories to *S&SF*.

In addition, most of those students who did sell for the first time after attending Clarion sold only one or two stories. C. Davis Belcher sold one story to *Orbit* after that first workshop and, to the best of my knowledge, has sold nothing since. The only full time writer who came out of those first two workshops that I know of was Ed Bryant. (James Sutherland, who also attended them, now seems to have become a fulltime writer.) George Alec Effinger, F. M. Busby, and Vonda McIntyre came from later workshops. Several of us since then have sold ten or twenty stories, but not enough to make a living on. That group would include Neil Shapiro, myself, Glen Cook, Russell Bates, and David Skal. And most of their sales

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were to the *Clarion* anthologies, the *Dangerous Vision* series, or to *Orbit*.

Furthermore, at least some of those sales that Glen counted in his enumeration of sales by Clarion students came *before* the student came to Clarion. For example, I was the one who "sold" two songs (one in 1966), "about 25 poems" (all in the early Sixties), and a story to *Starship '69*. (In case you never heard of *Starship '69*, it was a collection of sf stories about sex edited by Harry Harrison that never got off the ground. Harrison was a shade ahead of his time, for two years later sf sex anthologies became the "thing" to do.) (Oh, yes, the story, "Penultimus," has yet to see print.)

As for the comparison between Clarion and the University of Colorado Workshop, it must be admitted that two things worked in Clarion's favor. First, the mainstream market in short fiction is very limited. It is not much larger than the market for short science fiction (and the *paying* market may actually be smaller), and the competition is much fiercer: there are many times more writers writing mainstream than writing science fiction.

Second, the University of Colorado Workshop was "massively sized," leading me to suspect that it was not so much a workshop as a conference. Writers' conferences usually last a few days, rarely as long as a week. Would-be writers, little old ladies in tennis shoes, and teachers attend them. Rather than workshopping stories, the attendees listen to lectures by visiting authors. If they're lucky, one of their stories will be read and the student will be given a written criticism by one of the visiting authors or a member of the committee that organized the workshop. Obviously, such a conference rarely gives the attendees much of worth. (Except for the teachers, who now have an extra addition for their resumés.)

Ted White's reply to Glen Cook's letter says more about writers' conferences, as well as bringing up another important aspect of workshops: "Writers' Conferences are, for the most part, joined by a regular following of their own: people who like to talk about writing, but rarely do much about it. A writer's workshop is something else, however. One can occur whenever and wherever a group of striving writers and would-be writers wants one. For instance, I can point to one in which I was myself a member. Other members included Terry Carr, Bill Meyers, Alexei Panshin, Lee Hoffman, and Dave Van Arnam. . . .the point is, *we* brought our own enthusiasm and desire to write to that workshop, where inspiration more or less cross-pollinated. I gather much the same has happened at Clarion. The difference is simply that we didn't wait for someone to organize and fund a teaching apparatus."

There is a great deal of truth in Ted's reply. One need merely think of the Left Bank of Paris in the Twenties, with Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. In the field of fantasy, H. P. Lovecraft stayed in Providence, R.I., for most of his life, but he maintained a voluminous correspondence with Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, and August Derleth. Robert Bloch later emerged from a regular meeting of writers in the Minneapolis area that included Derleth and Stanley G. Weinbaum. And most of today's established science fiction writers came out of the world of science fiction fandom: Isaac Asimov, Harlan

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Ellison, Frederik Pohl, Ted White, and Roger Zelazny, to name just a few. Having mèt each other at conventions and corresponded through the mail, most of them wanting to write science fiction, eventually the informal workshops formed.

Even outside our own little cosmos, this same process goes on. One thinks of artists as loners, working alone. But there have always been "schools" and "colonies" of artists: the Left Bank, Greenwich Village, North Beach. It is the rare artist, whether writer, painter, or composer, who works and produces in a total vaccuum. Even Thomas Wolfe, who (to the best of my knowledge) interacted with no other writers, had his editor, Maxwell Perkins, to learn from.

And this is where Ted White's reply to Glen Cook fails. He is completely right whenever a writer knows someone else who wants to be a writer. But the writer who lives in a total vaccuum, as far as interaction with other would-be writers is concerned, cannot form a workshop of one. This is where Clarion and its successors are especially helpful.

In my own case, Clarion was a turning point. I had been writing, off and on, since third grade. I had been reading science fiction since eighth grade, but (incredibly) I was completely unaware of fandom until I attended the first Clarion workshop. I had taken two creative writing classes in college, but none of the students were as serious about writing as I was. I discovered *The Writer* and *Writers Digest*, but these magazines began to get repetitous after a while. I even thought of joining the Famous Writers school. The Clarion workshops were my first introduction to serious beginning writers, much less to actual professionals. There was *no way* I could have taken part in an informal workshop. I suspect the same is ture of many would-be young writers in small towns throughout the country.

It is for people such as these that Clarion and its successors present an invaluable and otherwise unavailable opportunity. One can read the magazines and books about writing, but there is nothing that can compare with working side-by-side with a professional writer. And this is further enhanced by the round-robin criticism that takes place in the workshop atmosphere, whether it be the formal academic workshops of the Clarions or the informal ones in which Ted White has taken part.

Glen Cook mentions what can be *taught* in a workshop, but there are things that cannot be taught but can be *learned*, by seeing how other people have solved certain problems that have stymied you, by watching someone else's story grow through several revisions, by having your own specific shortcomings and strengths brought to your attention by others. By learning to criticize other people's work, eventually you learn to criticize your own, to attack it mercilessly (and, if you're a true writer, you will have less mercy on your own work than on anyone else's). By listening to twenty people's opinions of your story, you learn where you've failed: if one person doesn't understand your story while nineteen others do, you can figure that it's his problem and not yours. But when it's the other way around, you better start thinking. It is this continual atmosphere of sharing opinions that helps one to change and grow, to look at one's own stories in a way that cannot be taught directly and that certainly cannot be learned from reading articles and

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books on the craft of writing.

Though Glen Cook's claims for the success of the Clarion workshops may be a bit overdone (in a recent letter to me, Glen says he would not be quite so elaborate in his praises of Clarion today), there can be no doubt that they contributed a number of new writers to the science fiction field: George Alec Effinger, Ed Bryant, Bob Thurston, Vonda MacIntyre, Gerald Conway, Russell Bates, Jim Sutherland, Neil Shapiro, and Glen Cook himself all came out of the first three Clarions, not to mention several other writers who have only published two or three stories. The Tulane Workshop produced Scott Edelstein; F. M. Busby and Alan Brennert emerged from the Washington and Michigan workshops.

I'm sure there are several others, especially from the Washington and Michigan workshops, whom I have forgotten or of whom I am unaware, yet it still seems that the three Clarion workshops, with a maximum of sixty different people (and actually closer to forty, since several of us attended two summers), produced more writers of "stature" than the Tulane, Washinton, and Michigan workshops combined, with a maximum of 140 students. Why should this be?

I think that Robin Scott Wilson, the founder of the original Clarion workshop, is one of the prime reasons. It takes a man of particular talent to organize a truly successful formal workshop. Somehow, Robin was able to pick out from their application letters students who had at least some promise of writing ability and some seriousness of approach. In addition, Clarion State College was a small college in the hills of Pennsylvania, one of many Pennsylvania state colleges that were once strictly teaching colleges. Robin Wilson was a professor there, carrying some weight, carrying more weight than he would have in similar position in a larger school. There was far less red tape at Clarion State College than in a university; Robin had a direct line to the president's office, so to speak.

On the other hand, the other three formal workshops have been held at universities: Tulane, the University of Washington, and Eastern Michigan University. The workshops are just one of several things happening at the universities during the summer. The Tulane workshop was run by James Sallis and the Washington one by Vonda MacIntyre, both graduate students without the influence of a full professor. R. Glenn Wright, who runs the Michigan workshop, is a professor, but, unlike Robin Wilson, he is not a science fiction writer also.

The 1974 Washington workshop was cancelled because there wasn't any publicity in time; a number of students were admitted to the Tulane workshop not because they wanted to be writers but because twenty members were necessary for the university to allow the workshop only to get easy summer credits. One admitted that he was there only because his girlfriend was enrolled in the workshop. (On the other hand, this particular student, Bob Wissner, has since had several science fiction stories published. To the best of my knowledge his girlfriend has yet to be published.

Finally, there just wasn't much to do in Clarion, except write. Oh, there were a few parties every now and then; in 1968, several of us became acquainted with those involved with the summer theatre productions in the chapel and acquired lady friends from the college community. In 1969,

(cont. on page 65)

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Rich Brown's sole previous appearance here was "Dear Ted" (October, 1972), an explanation of why he could not submit a story. Now, after years of silence, he returns with a fine story indeed—

THE ADVENTURES OF JACK AND THAT WHICH BEFELL HIM

RICHARD W. BROWN

Illustrated by KEN KELLY

MAGNIFICENT EXCITEMENT and splendiferous adventure were qualities which Jack could almost—but not quite—pluck from the air.

He sat high on a green hillock, overlooking the lazy village of Ahnwee, which was his home, gazing to the North, the East, the South and the West. He sighed into the cool crisp air. He scratched his feet—something he did all too frequently when bored and thinking about his wanderlust.

How many times, he asked himself, had he heard hushed tales of these lands from the enchanted tongues of wastrels and vagabonds as they passed through the quiet village on their ways to and from? Legion, he answered.

He had heard grimly spoken gruesome tales of the Land of the Mordls and what they did to those who could not make them laugh. Jack inevitably shuddered—sometimes for several days on end—whenever he remembered these tales in any detail. But the Land of the Mordls was fortunately quite a safe distance to the North.

Also heard had been tales of the South, the Port of Agueried (which was forever at war) and the Bay of Equibelle which came in from the Great Green Sea. If the vagabonds were to be believed, double adventure lay there—for there were pirates to fight while aboard the ships, and then evil knights to be bested when (and, somewhat important under the circumstances, *if*) one reached the Land Across the Sea.

And the East, Jack had heard, held swamps and forests and hills

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and mountains and valleys; muck, trees, dirt, rocks and thorns. And one other important thing: The Unspeakable Terror of Gbtxl Thghflx. It was; he was willing to admit, quite unspeakable.

Few tales came from the West and the Enchanted Mountains of Zauberland; the small number who came from that direction talked but little or even not at all of things they had seen and heard and done—but magic was said to be King there.

His musings led the feet of his mind down avenues of thought they had often trod before: The main street was the dead-end conclusion that his life—up to this point, at least—had not been well-lived. That he had, in fact, spent all his seventeen summers (along with a fairly equal number of springs, winters and autumns) in boredom in Ahnwee, while the world around him beckoned with promises of adventure, fame and fortune. Why, he thought, it fairly begged him to touch his itchy feet to its velvet-smooth carpet—the roads which led to the fabled lands in the four directions from his home.

Jack sighed. He knew his fellow villagers preferred things as they were. Saw no reason to change. Frequently voiced displeasure at the mere possibility that things-as-they-were could be (this is an exact quote) "mucked up by some haphazard youth with shit-for-brains." Even made it perfectly clear that they thought he might

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be that very same haphazard youth.

It was not that he *feared* their certain dislike should he ever undertake a real adventure—merely that he did not want it. So whenever his feet began to itch, he walked to the top of nearby Potter's Hill, took off his shoes, scratched, and vowed that some day he would pick one of the earth's four directions and set off to achieve his destiny.

Some day. . .

ONE FINE SPRING MORNING shortly after Jack had turned eighteen, when the sky was clear as crystal and the sun was just warm enough to rob all sense of coolness from the air, he met Rose—

—which is really not the way it should be said at all, for Jack had known Rose most of his life.

Yet again, it was the only way to say it: They walked across the fields together, as they often had before, and he glanced at her, as he often had before, and she returned his look, as she often had before—and it was as if they had met and truly seen each other for the first time.

He noticed things he had somehow, quite unaccountably, overlooked in their previous pleasant romps: how the color of her cheeks matched her name, how her sure eyes were a deeper blue than the blue of the blue blue sky, how her silken yellow hair outshown that beautiful spring morning's perfect sun, and how her smile and body, as they sank together into the tall grass, more than radiated its warmth. He noticed with his eyes and shy hands how her body had grown and now curved first out, then in, then back out again in a thoroughly delightful way.

Why had he suddenly noticed all these wonderful things?

Well you might ask. It may have been a trick of the morning light, or because he had been eating more carrots than usual, or (even more possible—although admittedly a bit late for a farm youngster) the sudden accentuation of certain glands.

He would never know.

But whatever the reason, these observations—and what resulted from them—brought about immediate changes in Jack and what he did with his time.

This, in turn, brought about a change in the villagers' attitude towards him.

They noted the long hours he spent with Rose.

They smiled their wise and knowing smiles.

They eased up in voicing the displeasure they had always been quick to show when Jack spoke of his wild thoughts and dreamed his crazy dreams.

After all, as the wise and more knowledgeable villagers pointed out, if Rose couldn't cure his itchy feet, then probably nothing could.

IF ROSE COULDN'T cure his itchy feet, Jack thought, then probably

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nothing could. But the craving for adventure and travel had, for eighteen years, been bubbling up inside him like a sink full of soap-flakes; now that all the outside pressure had apparently disappeared, it was ready to froth over his very edges.

So a short while later he made up his mind in secret, took no counsel and resolved that not even his beautiful Rose would dissuade him. He suited himself up in armor he'd managed to bang and scrounge together from the local used oxen-cart dealer.

Since he knew he might never see Rose again, stopping by to kiss her goodbye turned out to be the hardest thing he'd ever done. But a short five hours later, completely armored and amoured, he headed South—South, toward the Port of Agueried, the Sea and (if he was lucky) the land where the knights were fighting.

IT WAS A TIME of war in the South. But then, it always was.

The Port of Agueried on the Bay of Esquibelle never slept; Naval and military men strode and rode its twisting streets, walked and talked on its by-ways at all hours of the day and night; fishmongers hawked their wares from dawn to dusk to dawn; by day and night, through cloud and flame, smithies pumped their bellows and hammered steel, while merchants constantly haggled with their suppliers and potential customers; and men of all walks of life, good and evil, went hither and thither and occasionally yon.

Regrettably, as is often the case in countries which are at war, precision craftsmanship at the Port had fallen victim to expediency: With a war on, quantity rather than quality was the by-word.

Thus, we set the groundwork for Jack's failure to get far enough to fight any pirates, much less any evil knights across the Great Green Sea.

Sure enough, upon his arrival, his enlistment in the forces of Count Snickerdoodle Bean was accepted. He was assigned, and immediately reported to, the count's newest, sleekest craft. And, when that boat slid slowly and majestically down into the water for the first time with Jack standing at the bow, his armor glinting brightly in the sun, his eyes gazing sternly out to sea and his jaw squared in truly heroesque fashion, it kept right on going down.

And down.

. . .and down.

WHEN JACK dripped his way back to the village of Ahnwee, he spent part of what was left of his eighteenth year trying to clean the rust from his armor. It was a credit to his good sense, however, that he soon dropped this endeavor with a resounding clatter to spend as much time as he could with Rose—and often much

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that he could not.

What was time? There really seemed to be no such thing with the feel of her soft, young body vibrantly close to his: Hours slipped by with a delicate caress as he kissed her full ruby mouth; days became short avenues of searing fire as he ran his fingers through her long silken tresses; weeks were but a twinkling of her lovely blue eyes into which he could lose himself, and months tiptoed past on silken petal feet as he found himself again in her tender smile.

The wise, knowing villagers, a bit more knowing but not a whit wiser, smiled among themselves and told each other it was over and done, without harm, so it was just as well that Jack had gotten the wanderlust out of his system.

Not wanting to disillusion them, Jack did not speak of the future but instead readily laughed when they laughed at his foolish adventure. The South, he admitted to himself, had been a disappointment—but it had been only one direction, one adventure. There remained the North, the East and the West. . .

A FULL YEAR passed and Jack was nineteen before he again proved a disappointment to his fellow villagers and once more prepared himself for journey: He sharpened and cleaned the rust from his sword, added arrows to his quiver and packed himself a light lunch.

He waited for the sun to peak over the western mountains before he started out. By then the nip was being coaxed out of the air by that orb, and he could not help but think how it had done the same when first he had really "seen" Rose; the air was clean and fresh, assaulting his nostrils with its natural perfumes, and again he thought of Rose; the loveliness of the countryside reminded him of how beautiful his Rose was, and when he bit a juicy pear he once again thought of Rose.

Although it delayed him for three and a half days, he stopped to say goodbye to his beautiful but tearful lady. But eventually he set off, his light lunch replenished, toward the East and the Unspeakable Terror of Gbtxl Thghflx.

He travelled several days and many leagues, over hills, through swamps, up mountainsides and down into valleys before he met anything that might be "It." And then, when he did, "it" turned out to be a "them".

They were considerably smaller than Jack and five in number, standing very close together, barely discernible through the foggy morning mists and mostly obscured by a bush and several trees. He could see, however, that their skin resembled human skin—and yet that there was where all resemblance ended. They had shells for heads—or at least Jack thought of them as "heads", although he could make out no noses, eyes, mouths nor

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ears. He told himself that he had never conceived of—much less ever seen—creatures such as these; and yet, for all their outlandishness, there was *some*thing he found disturbingly familiar about them.

He did not have much time to think. They were here. He was here. They were undoubtedly the Unspeakable Terror of Gbtxl Thghflx and while the meaning of the last two words was unclear, the first two words had undeniable meaning. There seemed to be but one thing for him to do: Unleasing his sword, he charged the creatures, hoping to catch them all in a single devastating arc of his blade. But he only managed to nick one before they flew straight up together—attached to something he could not quite believe he was seeing.

From high above he heard a mighty cry of pain. Then they came back down together, crashing effortlessly through a tree, and hit the ground with a resounding "whomph!" much too close to Jack. He saw, then, unmistakably, what they were attached to and vaguely understood that his vision had been impaired more by the dim light of dawn and the trees than he had thought. Immediately he knew why they had looked so familiar: He had seen them many times before. In miniature. While thinking. They were toes. Attached to a foot.

Jack sent his eyes upwards to the shin, the knee. Further on he was able to focus on a thigh, observe a waist, discern a chest and so forth, until his eyes reached up and up and he was looking at the Giant himself.

The Giant himself was looking back. Time stood ever-so-perceptibly still as Jack tried to clear both his head and throat to speak—while slowly inching backward toward the denser woods, safety, freedom, escape.

"Gardyloo!" the Giant roared. Jack jumped. Not hastily enough: The sweep of the Giant's powerful hand sent him tumbling head over heels, sword, bow, arrows, light lunch and all, into yet another bush.

Fortunately, the Giant's powers of concentration were none too keen and out of sight was quickly out of mind. It tromped off in the opposite direction, vaguely aware that something small had troubled it but a few seconds before yet not making the connection between the small something and the rather large and painful cut on its big toe.

When Jack had quite finished trembling and taking out the prickly thorns and trembling again, he made the long journey back to the village and out of the land of the Unspeakable Terror of Gbtxl Thghflx. Jack never spoke of his encounter to anyone. While the average villager might think him foolhardy, he at least had sense enough not to add a strained larynx to a sprained

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shoulder.

WHILE ROSE accepted him back warmly and completely, the other villagers tried their best to ignore Jack. But time—such being its usual bent—passed. And eventually the villagers began to speak of him in positive terms again: Mixing hope with rationalization rather than reason, they began to say that with two disappointments in adventure ("on the one hand") and more or less having his way with Rose ("on the other"), he should surely be cured of the hopeless itchy yearning to seek something better elsewhere.

So he became an accepted member of Ahnwee again. For a while.

Even Jack realized that, with two disappointments in adventure plus having his way with his lovely Rose, he *should* have been cured of his yearning—not for something "better"—for something new and different. His feelings were colored by the growing tenderness he felt for Rose; things had now gone quite a bit beyond mere physical pleasure. In all this time, Rose had grown more beautiful, more affectionate, more loving, kind, compassionate, intelligent and gentle; she had demonstrated beyond question or doubt her growing love for him, whether for his faults or in spite of them.

The wise and knowing villagers were correct only in their gauge of the intensity of Jack's feeling for Rose: He wanted to marry her, to settle down, farm, relax, raise children and enjoy life. But the desire was not the strongest thing in him. Not yet. Not with half the world unseen, untouched, untasted and unremembered.

WITHOUT ADO OR FANFARE, Jack tripped over the threshhold of the future into the last year of his second decade.

The flowers bloomed exceptionally large and early that spring on Potter's Hill. Jack and Rose wended their way, late one afternoon, up the gentle slope, assaulted by the colors and the smells: red petunias, purple crocuses, violet lilacs, yellow zenias and white and violet flox, blending their sweet aromas into a mixture that was at once intoxicating and refreshing. Atop the peak, as the sun began to do a slow go-down in the East, the two made gentle love to one another.

When they had finished and snacked on wild berries, Rose sat with her back against a tree as Jack relaxed with his head in her lap. He tried then, tried as hard as he ever had, to explain to her why he felt he had to go, knowing all the while that his resolve was weak and that if she put up any kind of resistance or argument (as she had twice before) he would stay. He might come to hate himself for it, but he would sacrifice his dream if that was what he had to do to prove his love for her.

Rose, however, had added un-

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derstanding to all her other virtues: "You must, so you must, though I don't understand it nor even pretend to," she told him, smiling, playing with his hair, "save that it has nothing to do with you and I or what we feel for each other. Go, then. But come back—and I'll be waiting for you, here, whenever."

And so, the next morning, he was gone, heading North to the Mordls' land.

The Mordls were grim beings, semi-giants. It was said that no human had ever bested one in combat. It was also said that they ate of human flesh, although Jack tended—prefered, actually—to doubt the credibility of these tales.

Mordls had but one weakness, according to what was known about them, and that was their intense desire to laugh. Being grim, they most wanted that which was not theirs—laughter, mirth, gaiety, happiness. The Mordls were bound by time-honored custom to give their gold to any man who could make them laugh, even though the custom was looked upon as irresponsible by many outsiders.

By the same custom, however, they also felt themselves bound to kill those who could not make them laugh—which was, Jack felt, just as irresponsible in its own way.

For that reason, Jack had taken no weapons save the bow he would need to hunt for food along the way. Instead, as he walked northward, he armed himself with all the jokes and witticisms he had ever heard, memorizing them and practicing them in his head. The journey took a good many days, so that as he entered the Land of the Mordls, his "weapons" numbered one hundred and seventy-three.

Jack knew precisely when he had entered their domain; the countryside, suiting their grim natures, was suddenly black, barren, desolate and decimated.

A Mordl jumped down off a rock and landed in front of Jack. "I'll laugh or you'll die—what'll it be?" the being hissed.

Jack knew the moment of truth was at hand. He also knew that he, himself, would have had an extremely difficult time hissing such a statement, since it contained not a single "s". But the Mordl managed it with such ease that the overall effect was extraordinarily devastating and terrifying.

In fact, it was so extraordinarily devastating and terrifying that poor Jack was literally frightened out of his wits.

Gone were the patient hours of study.

Gone were the hard days of patient memorization.

Gone were the one hundred and seventy-three jokes and anecdotes that were to have been his arsenal against the deadly dreaded Mordls.

Gone.

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The sight of the Mordl unleashing a razor-sharp double-edged sword did nothing to inspire Jack. In fact, he thought, he had not felt so decidedly unpleasant since Rose's father, the farmer, had caught them that morning after the rain—

"Wait," Jack said. He would have said that in any event, but running that incident with Rose and her father over in his mind, it began to seem that—with a little change for effect—its telling just might save his life.

The Mordl lifted the blade and sneered widely enough to show sharp fangs.

Jack said, "I have one: There was this, uh, travelling vagabond, see?, and he was wandering about the countryside when suddenly it started to rain. Well, as luck would have it; he was miles from any village. So he stopped at the nearest farmhouse to see if he could find shelter and perhaps a place to rest. 'Well,' said the farmer, 'I'll be glad to give you a place to rest, but first you'll have to make me a promise because you'll be sharing the bed with my—' "

Waxing loquacious, Jack tried to drag the anecdote out—because he did not know if the end of it would punctuate his own. All too soon the end of the anecdote was before him and he realized he either had to chance his punchline or fall flat. He paused, gulped, heard his own voice finish as if from a great distance: ". . . so the vagabond said, 'I had one once, but the wheels fell off!' "

The Mordl said nothing. It opened its mouth, again revealing huge fangs—then fell to the ground where it rolled in helpless mirth. The grim being, at the end of an hour—when it had recovered from its laughter—held to the time-honored custom and Jack walked off with its gold. The next *six* Mordls he met held to the custom and he walked off with their gold as well.

Jack had so much gold he could hardly walk. But walk he did—and carrying it all the many miles back to the village on foot turned out to be the *second* hardest thing he'd ever done.

But the crowd who came to marvel at his treasure and listen raptly to his tale, chuckling in agreement when he laughed at the Mordls and their customs—"What fools these Mordls be!" someone exclaimed—made it all seem worthwhile. Indeed, had it all been what it seemed, Jack would have settled down with Rose that very year a completely happy man.

But one of the villagers—the blacksmithy, who knew of such things—remarked, "Aye, the Mordls are certainly foolish creatures; 'tis well known that the metal they collect is called 'fool's gold'."

So Jack returned to his home, leaving the sparkling, heavy, worthless rocks where they lay.

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He returned despondent rather than triumphant, disappointed rather than satisfied, weary and dejected rather than bright and cheerful.

But Rose was waiting for him; consolation enough for losing a kingdom.

ALTHOUGH he spent most of his time with Rose the following year, none of the wise and knowing villagers spoke of Jack staying much longer than that. To do so, they felt, would not be a credit to their wisdom and knowledge, both of which were already suffering a credibility gap because of their previous errors about him.

These villagers were, if not knowledgeable, at least wise in taking and holding the course they did: When he was twenty and one and had slipped into his third decade, even though it now pained him to let the beauty of Rose out of his sight for more than a moment, he sneaked out of the village.

Not because it was his choice but because it was his fate, he took the only direction left to him: The West, from whence so few tales had come, the Enchanted Mountains of Zauberland, the land of magic—black, white, grey, maroon, chartreuse, not to mention various other shades and hues.

He had not travelled far in the final direction when a dragon stepped out from behind a tree and introduced himself.

"Glad to meet you," said Jack.

"The pleasure's mine," the dragon assured him, and after a few social pleasantries he decided to lay his story on the line: It seemed he needed an honest man because his Princess had been placed under a sleeping spell by an irate warlock's apprentice. "Honesty must be the middle name of he who breaks my spell," the warlock's apprentice had said.

Jack assured the dragon that honesty was his middle name.

"Honesty is my middle name," Jack said assuringly. And he was being truthful as well as honest, since his parents had named him Jack Honesty Jones. They had hoped, by so naming him, that he might thus acquire some of that virtue. And they felt, even if he failed to live up to the name, that it might prove a useful asset should he ever decide to go into business for himself—say, selling used oxen carts.

The dragon led him through the forest until they came to a clearing. There, on a bower of red and golden leaves, lay the sleeping Princess. Jack walked over and touched her and she immediately sat bolt upright, opened her pretty eyes and smiled beautifully. She was exceedingly beautiful as sleeping Princesses go. (Had she not been, of course, Jack would have followed the old adage of adventurers and let sleeping dogs lie.)

With a sigh the Princess exclaimed, "George, you've saved me

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at last!"

Jack was on the verge of explaining that his name was Jack rather than George when the Princess, who was by now on her feet, brushed past him and into the arms of the man behind him.

There was a man behind Jack where there had not been one a moment before. Dressed like a Prince. And, Jack noted significantly, the dragon had disappeared.

Then Jack remembered that the dragon had introduced himself.

Had, in fact, introduced himself as "George".

Jack had thought, at the time, that that was a funny sort of name for a dragon but he had been too polite to say anything about it.

As if to force the conclusion home, the Prince thanked Jack in what had been the dragon's voice. Then the couple walked into the woods hand in hand, leaving Jack to look after them.

"You spent all that time as a *dragon*?" he heard the Princess say. "What if a Knight had come along? Oh, George, I'm *so* sorry—I'll try to make it all up to you, somehow."

Jack thought he heard a roguish cackle—which may, or may not, have been George. He couldn't be sure.

Jack shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, that's that, I guess," or something equally philosophical.

The last direction had proven no better than the other three. He sighed, turned and headed back in the direction of Ahnwee—a little sad, a little dejected. Rose was, of course, waiting.

JACK SETTLED DOWN. He became respectable—or as respectable as one could become in Ahnwee after having travelled. He married Rose—who was, he was the first to admit, far and away more beautiful than the lovely Princess he had but briefly encountered in the Enchanted Mountains—worked hard, built a home, became the father of twins and, sometimes, told his fellow villagers about the three of his four journeys he could clearly speak about. Some were impressed, others not.

Ever did his feet itch to do more travelling. Yet, he told himself, in four short years his wanderings had devoured the directions of the earth. North, South, East and West were memories; all had been started for enterprise, enjoyment and adventure, and although none had been entirely successful, yet each had provided a little of what he had sought and was therefore worth remembering.

But they were not worth doing over again, he felt—the sense of wonder and newness would be lost, the sense of challenging the unknown completely absent. So, whenever his feet itched, he scratched them—or let Rose do it.

The villagers, while friendly

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enough most times, always seemed to suspect that, some day, he just might take off again on some new and wild adventure, and consequently most of them were just a bit afraid of Jack. Sometimes this resulted in his not being able to sell his crops to some merchants—but just as often it meant he got a higher price for what he did sell, so it did not worry him overmuch.

Eventually they began to speak of him with confidence again: Even the wise and knowing villagers, who'd sworn off predicting him until St. Geoffrey's Day, said he was a contented, happy, good-hearted man.

IT WAS QUITE some time later—at the age of twenty-nine, the father of five, his feet scratched red for want of travel and adventure—that he listened to a wild, fanciful tale of a vagabond assumed by most of the villagers to be a fraud and bunkum.

Jack's eyes lit up with pleasure as he listened to the wastrel's tale. Even from a distance one could hear Jack's shouted exclamations punctuating the wanderer's narrative: "How wrong I was!" and "This'll be one for the books!"

He talked with the traveller for quite a long time, argued, finally traded his best cow for the contents of a small bag the man wore around his neck, which Jack promptly planted outside his bedroom window.

It was only a bean. . .

—RICH BROWN

Editorial (cont. from page 53)

we had a midnight marshmallow roast in the graveyard (during which, yours truly was shot at by an irate famer), a ghost hunt in the chapel, and Russell Bates demonstrated the bomb-making skills he had acquired in the army. But usually there was nothing to do but sit on the porch of Becht Hall and talk with your fellow students. . . . and listen to the typewriters clacking from those students who weren't on the porch.

All three of the later workshops were held in cities: New Orleans, Seattle, and East Lansing, Michigan. This offers many distractions. I know that I spent much of my time in New Orleans wandering around the French Quarter, cadging pastrami sandwiches and playing for spare change in one of the folk bars.

This isn't meant to disparage the Tulane, Washington, or Michigan workshops. In fact, it tends to underline what Ted White said. When writers get together, work *will* get done, not matter what the distractions are. But it does point out that the original Clarion workshops were perhaps a fluke, a combination of astrological influences, perhaps, that brought Robin ScottWilson to Clarion, Pa. in 1967. For the results, we should all be grateful. The workshops do fulfill a purpose for those would-be writers who are unfortunate enough to know no one else seriously interested in writing. If only one new writer comes out of them who otherwise would probably not have been published, they are successful.

—GRANT CARRINGTON

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GOODBYE JOE QUIETWATER—HELLO!

Bill Nabors made his professional debut in these pages with "The State of Ultimate Peace" (March, 1974). If the story which follows—an unusual evocation of a unique trinity—is any example of Nabors' abilities, his will be a name to watch for in years to come.

WILLIAM NABORS

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

"All that I see
With my eye is me
And no other truth"
—Elizabeth Bartlett

October 12
TOWER STATE RETREAT

EXILE IS NOT such a bad thing, if you can dream of your homeland as it was in the days of youth; an old house, a mountain village, parents, childhood friends, your favorite toys. But if your land has slipped away and the past is a lost century in your soul, then the voice of exile is like a sentence into an arid and empty country, without even the company of flesh eaters or the bones of the dead.

WHO WAS Joe Quietwater? Who was Harry Nox?

A Cherokee Indian who painted pictures; the judge of many courts.

LET ME TELL YOU what Kriel thinks, for he is our keeper; our nurse attendent. He is a crass man. He could not believe in a Quietwater canvas or the innocence of any judge. Kriel believes in evidence; facts and figures, dollars, cents, guineas and pounds and how to get the best of any bargain. As an attendent, he is shrewd; almost invisible. He comes when we most want to be alone. He plagues us with questions; absurdities. He would make the perfect bill collector; he is a natural irritant. This is what he says about our confinement: "Life is hell—what you expect —payola?"

We shrug.

THIS ROOM is dull beige. Its paint is sad and cracking. Everything in it is either bolted down or fastened shut. There are no real windows. Sometimes, Nox or I stand on a chest of drawers and look out tiny holes we've punched in the insulation around the air-

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conditioning unit. Yesterday, Kriel found me up there. "Get down," he said, "and don't do that anymore!"

I asked why, but he would not answer.

"Can I have a dictionary?" I asked.

"I will see," he said, "but do get down!"

"YOU CANNOT HAVE a dictionary," Kriel said later.

"Why?"

"Because, you have paper and pens."

"Take them then and bring me a dictionary or a book of verse; The Oxford Book Of—"

"I cannot."

"And why can't you?"

"Because, then you would want paper and pens."

Then he leaves. I don't like to admit it, but he is right. Fundamentally, though, he is wrong. How does a man choose between the necessary and the vital; how is he to know the difference?

HARRY NOX climbs up on the chest of drawers, peers out and ask, "Is Kriel a devil?"

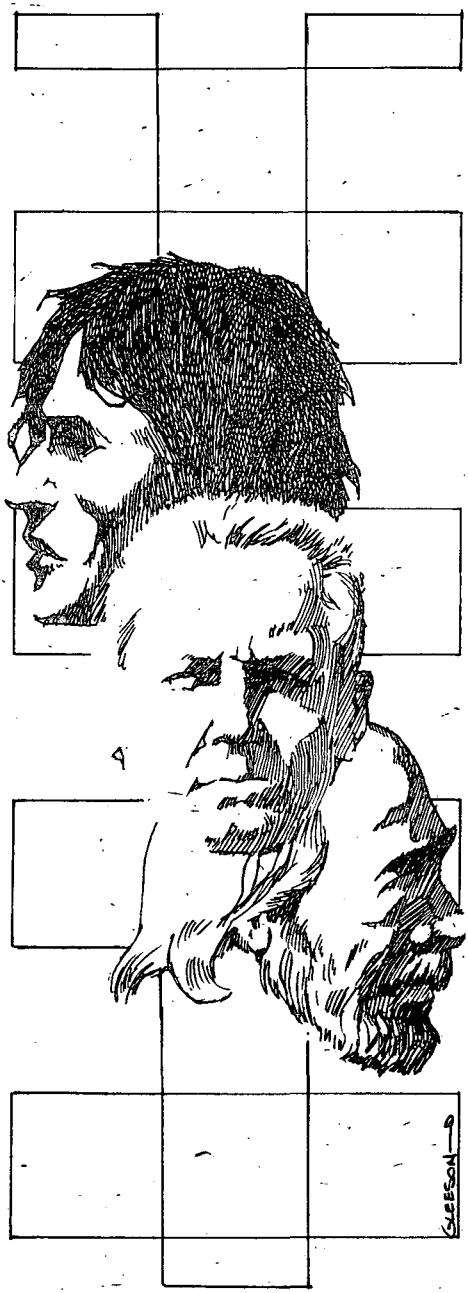
Quietwater laughs. "What do you see out there, Harry?"

"Nothing but smoke," says Nox. "Why do we keep looking?"

"Sometimes," says Quietwater, "we Indians can read the smoke—if it says anything."

"But you never look," says Nox.

"I'm afraid it will say things I don't want to know."



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"You crazy Indian, what do you think: *Is Kriel a devil?*"

"Probably and possibly, but not likely," says Quietwater.

Nox looks at me. Again, I shrug. We sum up most everything with a shrug. At times I've wondered—Harry and I have discussed it—if perhaps all the great mysteries that remain to man, aren't merely the result of shrugging. If man hadn't learned to shrug, he might have solved everything.

HOW DID we get here? By train, naturally. We came in a coach with windows painted black, so that we could not find our way back to our native haunts. Quietwater did not try to count the days of his journey. Poor Nox lost track, after what he thinks was a week. I slept through the whole trip. Still, at times, when I pine for the comfort of a good book or the sound of a native song, I hear the whine of rails and wonder if home is far away.

But what was my crime? Well, actually there were two, but which two, Harry and Quietwater or—No, I won't go into all the ramifications now—but neither was really a crime. The problem is simply one of identities. If I confess that I am Joe Quietwater, then the charge is disposing of Judge Nox and Locksmith Black, your affable recorder. On the other hand, if I say I am Judge Nox, the authorities demand to know the whereabouts of Quietwater and Black. If I confess that I'm the locksmith, then I must account for Nox and Quietwater.

Each of these judicial dilemmas bears further consequences within and beyond the offices of officialdom. Black's lot (prejudice does not enter here; I'm recording secretary and speak for all) is, perhaps, the most terrifying. He has successfully avoided contact with record keepers and other authorities for more than twenty years—never even buying anything by mail—in an effort to establish himself, officially, a nonperson. Should it come to light that he is responsible for these crimes, he will also be brought to account for a quarter-century's back taxes; alimony and mortgage payments—plus interest. Is it any wonder he is the frugal member of our trinity?

Then there is Harry's problem. He was never happy on the bench. It was his wife, Caroline, always pushing him that resulted in his rise to Associate Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court. Harry found the post a misery. He was an insomniac when we joined forces. Where many men lust after positions of power, for their ego's sake, Harry never enjoyed his post. He feared and resented it. No matter how he ruled, he always had a gut feeling that he was wrong. Ultimately, it lost him his stomach. A green ambulance hauled him over to *Walter Reed* one Sunday. His stomach was cut out and replaced with that of a

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young goat. Harry was never the same again; he could sleep no longer than an hour at a time. When we found him he had been awake for four days, and Caroline—that woman could drive jesus p. christ himself—but everyone's met a Caroline.

And what about the Quietwater identity? It's the only one I'd consider on a permanent basis and it won't do. The chaotic life of that mad Indian artist offers adventures which neither Nox or I could have managed on his own. But Quietwater left alone, is capable of anything. There are too many unstablizing factors in his past. Until we joined forces, he was never exactly certain, who he was. His identity was always a little clouded. Without Alvarez, he probably would have gone mad. The confusion resulted from his birthplace. In that town officialdom recognized only two races. Everything that wasn't white was black. Poor Quietwater, a brown red man, an Indian, born at home without the services of a doctor, didn't find out which race he was until he registered for school. Mrs. Arna P. Creedy, clerk-typist and Daughter of the Confederacy, determined his fate. He was deemed black; so was his brother, but a cousin, further down the alphabet was tapped white. It was the opening volley in a lifelong identity crisis. Later when his family moved fifteen miles north and the kids took an I.Q. test, it was determined that Quietwater's brother was too smart to stay black and Quietwater, pulled along on the wave of his brother's I.Q., became temporarily white.

It was not long, however, until the Cherokee in him rebelled. He began to write angry poetry and call his history teacher names like, "goddamn motherfuckin' liar." Not unexpectedly, he was removed from white school. However, he still thirsted for knowledge and so he enrolled, under an assumed name, in the local black school. It was only a short time until his ruse was discovered and he was rejected by the soul brothers. Finally, he went away with his grandfather and his thirteen-year-old gypsy grandma, Alvarèz. They were brilliant teachers. Quietrwater learned the Cherokee way and the way of the gypsy. He traveled the country from shore to shore, border to border; recording what he saw on canvas and absorbing the knowledge his vagabond teachers could pass on to him. He could not, however, finally determine if he should be black, white or red. The conflict still shows up in his work.

Thus, considering our lives as separate entities, it should be obvious that we get on much better as a trinity. I am, except for this confinement and the irritation of Kriel, most happy this way. My chief sorrow is the fact that millions of people can express belief in an eternal trinity which they have never seen, but claim om-

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nipotence for, while not a single individual of my acquaintance will believe in a mortal trinity which stands before him and claims only its right to exist in a world already gone crazy; bent on suicide, delaying only to debate the fine points of rapid destruction as opposed to the slow agonizing variety.

It seems to me that in such times, convention could be suspended, even in regard to identities. If a man wants to be a trinity, why shouldn't he; why should such a desire mean exile and confinement? Compared to the rather bizarre behavior of the early Christians, who lolled about awaiting the "second coming" and who were also living in the "last days," the desire to be three in one does not seem strange, merely frugal. On the day of Pentecost, they spoke in divers tongues and claimed to understand the cacophony of languages that abounded, as though each were his native tongue. Were they exiled? No, the worst that happened to them was to be accused by some scoffers of being full of "new wine." St. Peter merely pointed out that the sun was not yet over the yard-arm and he issue was resolved.

But was this linguistic revolution the worst of their doings? No, they had not yet even scratched the venerable surface. With the exception of Annanias and his wife, who were summarily executed for trying to preserve the spirit of free enterprise, these Christians were all egalitarians; communals—communist even! Just read your *ACTS* if you doubt my recounting of events. Witness chapter two verses 44-46: *"And all that believed were together and had all things in common./ And sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need./ And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart."*

Quietwater, Harry and I, propose nothing so radical. We merely wish to abide in one body; to be left alone. We do not want to make a revolution. The only indelicate thing we've ever done as a trinity, was a little romp through New Orleans with some ladies of the French Quarter. We, I—each wishes to take separate credit—must admit that we left the ladies quite happy. Triple libido is more or less a fringe benefit of trinityhood, but we have never abused it. We are not out to save the world or even to wipe out frigidity. Our trinity is simply a device against boredom. We pursue whichever of our lives is most enticing on a particular day, but always with the added perspective of the other two, at least that is what we did until the official inquiries got underway and we were sent into exile.

At first we were quite disappointed that no one would take

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heed of our discovery, but only charge us with crimes, but then Harry reminded us of the plight of Copernicus and Ralph Nader and we have reconciled ourselves to making an adjustment; some sort of recanting to remove what is, in the jargon of the day, a creditability gap. At present, however, we must cope with the thorny problem of Kriel. He is trying to drive us crazy.

KRIEL BROUGHT BISCUITS this morning. "The war is over," he announced.

"What war?" asked Harry. "I didn't know there was any war."

"You're joking," said Kriel; "of course, you're joking."

"Whose war was it?" asked Harry.

"I couldn't say that, at least I don't think it would be regulation to say that. All I can say is that the war is over. We won and according to reports there is cheering in the streets from Vladivostock to Butte. Haven't you seen the crowds through your peepholes?"

"We've only seen smoke," said Harry.

"Well, bad luck; perhaps I'll show you pictures of the celebration. Yes, I'll bring pictures."

I raised the question of a book again. "How about my dictionary?" I asked.

"Well, I might arrange it, for consideration. Offer me something of value."

"I don't have anything, anything but my hiking boots. They're jointly owned."

"Well, where are you going to hike to, your honor?" asked Kriel.

"I can't give up these boots," I said "and don't call me your honor."

"Are you planning an escape?" asked Kriel.

"I'm—"

"If you're planning any such thing as an escape, I'm afraid I'll have to have your boots."

"Well, I wasn't—"

Kriel slammed the door.

"He'll have the boots now," said Quietwater.

"The war is over," said poor Harry.

"What war?" laughed Quietwater. "Do you believe that about a war—look out your peephole."

"Is Kriel a devil?" asked Harry.

We shrug.

THIS IS OUR DREAM; the city is New Orleans. We are coming apart—Kriel is ripping us into shreds. "And who were you?" says Kriel.

"I—a locksmith and spent my summers traveling cool country and my winters mending locks in the south. Then last summer—or was it ten, twenty summers ago, I broke the habit—I met Alvarez in a bar in the French Quarter. I think the place was called Napoleon House. Yes it was, Mr. Kriel; they play classical music there. We sat on the patio. Alvarez is a beautiful woman, striking. She introduced us Mr. Kriel,

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Quietwater and I. Then we caught the judge's soul. He was already dying and so was I, and Alvarez said we would use Quietwater's body and we did Mr. Kriel, because he was youngest and strongest and then we walked the streets of the Vieux Carre and it was comfortable. Alvarez was with us. She took us to Jackson Square. We watched the sidewalk artist and listened to lay preachers and street singers, and Mr. Kriel there was a blind boy who played banjo and he told the tale of a voodoo Queen and we laughed and Alvarez said "No," she was not voodoo, but a compassionate mother—mother of our souls—and we would be her children; happier and wiser for we would know and understand two others and get along and escape some of the futility, because three make more diversions than one and Quietwater would be a better artist if we could push the final truth a little beyond reality, Mr. Kriel."

THIS MORNING Quietwater looked out. It was the first time. "I saw a dove," he said "not a real one, but a dove of smoke. It must mean something. Perhaps Alvarez is near by. She would know how to handle this confinement."

"Yes," said Harry, "maybe she will rescue us."

"We can't always count on Alvarez," I said. "Sometime, we will have to learn to rely on ourselves."

"You talk crazy," said Quietwater.

"Kriel is getting to you," said Harry.

"Let me tell you about Alvarez," said Quietwater. "She knows everything! She rides the winds. Once before when I was alone and in a desperate situation, she and grandfather saved me. I had just been thrown from school. My father was ashamed. My mother would not speak. Why couldn't I be like my brother, they said. Did I not know how much easier it was to be white, what rewards whites received for their sickly tints. They made me feel stupid. Then grandfather came down from Cherokee. 'Alvarez has again ridden the winds,' he said. 'We were in town to buy seed and to complain about the Mr. Sears and Roebuck order. Alvarez said, 'old one it would not be wise to buy seed this year.'

Grandfather thought this meant that Alvarez had seen his death. 'I will buy seed anyhow,' he said. 'I will die with the joy that I have planted new seed; seed that will grow even when I've joined the ancient one.'

'You will have seed,' she said, 'but of another kind,' As would any worthy Cherokee, Grandfather made jokes with her about this. 'Old one,' she said, 'do not jest; tell Mr. Sears and Mr. Roebucks to forget your order. Our grandson needs us.'

Grandfather understood her

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seriousness. It was the guitar he had promised for Alvarez's birthday, that they had gone to complain about. He knew she would not leave Cherokee without it, unless it was a grave matter. Afterwards, he never ceased long in the battery of curses he hurled at *Sears & Roebucks*. 'Their store is everywhere,' he would say, 'do they need so many buildings? They are like men with too many wives and horses. They do justice to none. Their merchandise is of dung heaps!'

He was ranting thus, when Alvarez drove their wagon into my father's yard. Before I could tell them my sorrow, Alvarez said, 'Do not worry, we are here to save you from this crisis of knowledge. We will teach you.'

Always, these grandparents have come in my time of need; even after grandfather's death, when Alvarez was settled in the Vieux Carre. You know these things are true. Alvarez is a powerful mother; ultimately, she shows up."

THIS AFTERNOON I looked out the peephole. For just an instant, I too, saw Quietwater's dove of smoke. I turned to tell Harry, but when we looked again, it was just ordinary smoke. Kriel entered as we climbed down from the chest. Somehow, I knew he had come about the boots; the time for negotiation had arrived.

Quietwater said, "Don't trust him, Black—never trust a man who wears a necktie when he doesn't have to."

"That's right," said Harry, "shysters never take off their ties. They're always ready to do business."

"They're ready to show you your place," said Quietweater. "Never trust—"

"Shut up," Kriel screamed.

"He's a devil," said Harry.

"I think so too," said Quietwater, "let's choke him with his tie."

"Well, I don't know," said Harry.

"Mr. Kriel is here to bargain," I said. "Leave him alone. Let him look at my display."

Kriel read the note I had attached to the hiking boots: "*Special Discount:* HIKING BOOTS: *Three Sovereigns.*"

"What is a sovereign?" he asked.

"In this market, a sovereign is a volume of my choice—a book, sir."

"I see," he said, "but what if I simply take your boots and leave you to your silly game of sovereigns?"

"I wouldn't advise that. No telling what kind of revolt you might provoke."

Kriel smiled. He straightened his tie and gazed at the boots. "I will take them. It's snowing outside. I will give only two sovereigns, however, two volumes of *my* choice. You're dealing in a market of limited demand; you must take what you can get."

"Only two books! Divide and

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conquer, is that your game," said Quietwater. "We need three books."

"What about those war pictures," screamed Harry. "I want to see those goddamn war pictures!"

"I accept your terms," I said.

IT HAS BEEN three days. Kriel has not brought our books. We are lonely. We bicker a lot. Quietwater and Harry argue constantly about the dove of smoke. I argue with both of them about the oversight I made in allowing Kriel to take possession of the boots without first delivering our library. At least once every hour Quietwater or Harry says, "Now, Alvarez is truly our only hope. We are going to die of boredom. It's your fault, Black!"

I shrug. I know how much it irritates them. Obviously, we are divided and we don't even have any property to fight over, or anything to be jealous about. It's a lousy world. I think I'll take a nap. What else is there?

KRIEL CAME while we were asleep. He left a package. I know it is our library but I hesitate to open it. "Go on Black, open it up," says Harry. "After all, you were the negotiator."

"I dreamed about the dove of smoke," says Quietwater, "I think it's a good sign. Let's see the books."

"Very well," I open the package: *The House At Pooh Corner* and *Philosophy In Our Times* are payment for the boots. We delve into philosophy first.

"It's only blank pages," says Harry.

"We've been cheated," says Quietwater, "and insulted!"

I open the other book, expecting some kind of trick; perhaps one of those volumes that triggers a cap or catches the finger, some kind of stinking joke. The volume, however, is new. It has not even been culled. It is fresh and unread.

"What kind of library is that?" says Harry.

"It is a library for exiles," I say.

"What's the point in it?" says Quietwater.

"Kriel's a devil," says Harry.

"You have a one track mind, Harry," Quietwater says. "Shall we quarrel over the book, over who gets it? I assume no one is interested in *Philosophy In Our Times*, at least not in its present condition. If we must quarrel, *I* want the little book first! The boots were actually mine; they came off *my* feet. I can't see that you whites should have any property rights at all. It is my body. I don't mind you using it, but after all, I was here first. Yes, if we must quarrel, I want my rights!"

"I want the little book too," says Harry, "I don't understand philosophy."

"Let's read together," I say, "we'll take turns and read outloud."

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"THAT'S WHAT WE ARE," says Harry.

"What?" I ask.

"Pooh bears: is Quietwater asleep?"

"Yes, he fell asleep on page fifteen; sometimes he's quite a dullard."

"Do you believe what he said about his dove of smoke? I don't know whether I do or not."

"Well, I think he saw it," I say; "but I don't think it means much. I don't think Alvarez will ever come again."

"Except for us then, he's on his own, is that it?" says Harry.

"I think so."

"Sometimes," says Harry, "he's quite stupid, to be such a good artist. Have you seen his *Dead House*? It's in the Phillips Gallery in Washington. It reminds me of this place. I used to look at it after bad days in court."

"You never did! Let's stop the charade, Harry. We should no longer speak without insight. None of us is torn between worlds, not anymore."

"What does that mean?"

"It means I'm too old to climb a honey tree and so are you. The 'hundred acre wood' is gone. We're here by choice, invitation. We can leave whenever we wish."

"Christopher Robin," says Harry, "did he ever grow up?"

"I don't know Harry, but I expect he gave up Pooh Bear or wore him out. Shall we say goodbye?"

"Will he be all right?"

"I don't know, but we can't do him any good. Shall we leave him a note and get back to our native region?"

"Yes, I suppose, let's do that. Let's leave him to his dove of smoke."

Quietwater moans softly. In a dream language I write: "Goodbye Joe Quietwater—Hello?"

—WILLIAM NABORS

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TECHMECH

ROBERT F. YOUNG

In his last appearance here ("Perchance to Dream," February) Robert F. Young dealt seriously with a powerful theme—the collective unconscious. Now he returns in a lighter vein to sketch for us the birth of a god for our times. . .

Illustrated by Laurence Kamp

OUR HERO this time is a sculptor named Morton; our scene, the interior of an abandoned warehouse that he has converted into a studio and which is located in the waterfront of a more-or-less typical American metropolis. The studio is equipped with an overhead traveling crane and a chain-fall, and furnished with a long workbench. Rectangles of morning sky was visible through a series of paneless windows spaced at even intervals just below the raftered ceiling, and on the right, a high, wide doorway looks out onto a chuckhole-crated street.

As the curtain rises we see Morton standing on one of the lower rungs of an aluminum extension ladder, his face hidden behind a welder's mask. A retractable cable trails down from a torch in his right hand to a portable electric arc welder that stands several feet from the base of the ladder, and he is busily at work welding a refurbished 1969 Falcon hubcap to the knee-joint of his latest masterpiece—a statue of heroic proportions entitled "Techmech". Typical traffic noises, occasionally interspersed by the sigh of the sea, are audible in the background.

MORTON *(extingushing the torch and tilting back his mask)*: There, old buddy-boy—that should do it. Now you're all set to be unveiled.

CHORUS *(Five working housewives who have paused to peer through the doorway on their way to work in the cannery next door)*: Hail, Techmech! We the Daughters of the Industrial Revolution salute you! *(Exit Chorus.*

Enter Morton's fiancée, Genevieve, bearing a covered tray.) GENEVIEVE: I brought you your breakfast, Joe. *(She clears a space on the cluttered workbench and sets the tray down.)* I figured you'd work all night, so I went to bed.

MORTON *(proudly)*: How's he look, Gen? He's all done.

GENEVIEVE *(gazing dubiously*

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up at the statue): Couldn't you weld on some kind of an upper lip so those awful teeth wouldn't show?

MORTON: Those teeth are solid aluminum-bronze cutter blades. I *want* them to show.

GENEVIEVE: Aren't you going to give him any eyelids?

MORTON: Hell no! *(He descends the ladder and lays the mask and torch aside.)*

GENEVIEVE: But without eyelids his eyes stick out too much. Everybody will know they're nothing but 22" picturetubes.

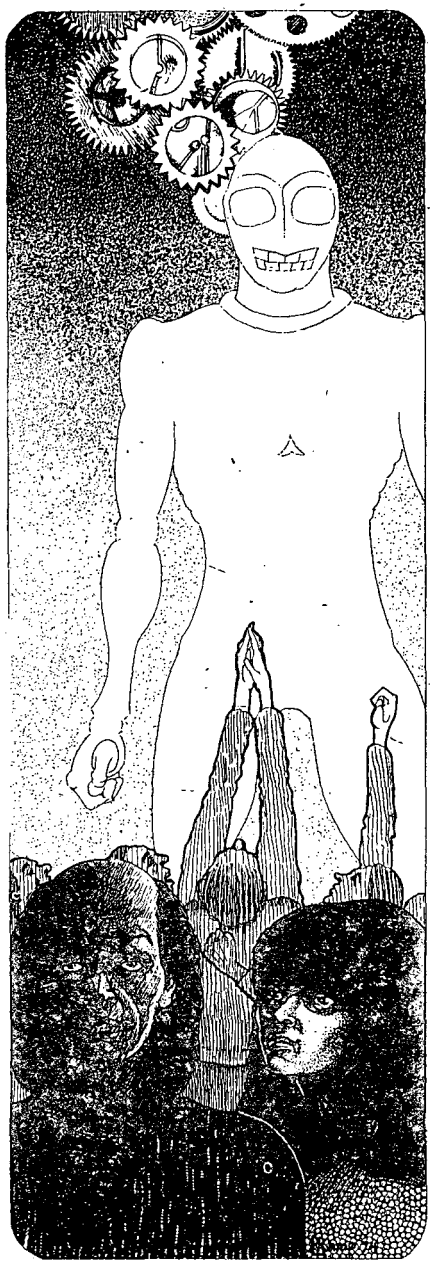
MORTON *(removing the cover from the tray):* What could be more fitting than for a statue epitomizing the technological age to have cathode-tube eyes? . . . How come just plain bread and butter?

GENEVIEVE: The toaster went on the fritz.

MORTON: I thought we just got it.

GENEVIEVE: We did.

Enter HERALD *(A retired Western Union messenger who wears his Western Union uniform morning, noon and night and who is spending his Golden Years haunting newsstands, memorizing newspaper headlines and reciting them afterward in bars, barbershops, billiard lounges and sundry other places):* NEW POWER BLACKOUT COVERS WISCONSIN, ILLINOIS, INDIANA, MICHIGAN AND OHIO. CHRYSLER TO RECALL ALL NEW-MODEL DODGE DARTS FOR POSSIBLE FUEL-PUMP



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FAILURE. PENN CENTRAL DERAILMENT IN UPSTATE NEW YORK KILLS 15. WOMAN IN POTTSVILLE, PA. OPENS SHELTER FOR STRAY CATS—CALLS IT "THE CATHOUSE". FORD MOTOR COMPANY TO BUILD NEW STAMPING PLANT IN NEWFOUNDLAND. 6 DEAD, 9 INJURED IN CHAIN-SHROUDED CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY. (*Exit* HERALD.)

GENEVIEVE *(still gazing at the statue)*: Don't you think you ought to rig him up a pair of pants out of an old tent or something, Joe?

MORTON *(finishing his breakfast)*: The implication being, I suppose, that that length of 4" plastic pipe I used isn't realistic enough.

GENEVIEVE: It isn't. Any reasonably well-educated woman will know the second she looks at it that he wouldn't be able to—couldn't possibly—get an erection in a million years!

MORTON *(slamming his fist on the workbench)*: Damn it, Gen, you're reacting atavistically! Techmech isn't a fertility god—he's a *technological* god!

GENEVIEVE: Joe! For a minute I thought he moved his head!

MORTON *(following her gaze)*: Probably it shifted a little on the cervical mount. Maybe I'd better reinforce the seam.

GENEVIEVE: He moved it again, Joe! The other way.

MORTON *(grabbing his mask and torch)*: I'll go up and have a look.

GENEVIEVE *(pulling him back from the ladder)*: No, Joe!—no! Look! His eyes are lighting up! His whole body's starting to glow. Joe, he's coming to life! He's *breathing!*

MORTON: Don't be ridiculous, Gen! How could he possibly come to life? He's nothing but an anthropomorphic agglomeration of automobile chassis, automobile tailpipes, automobile radiators, utility-appliance caibinets, television antennas, discarded computer components, airplane fuselage, bicycle chains, BX cable and chicken wire . . . My God! he *is* coming to life! My God, Gen!—he's *walking*!

The two mortals shrink back against the workbench clinging tightly to each other as Techmech lifts his right foot, extends it forward, knocking over the ladder and the electric arc welder, and plants it with an awesome clang! in the middle of the concrete floor. The cathode-tube eyes are aswirl with violent reds and blues and greens, but they take no cognizance of the two humans far below as their outsize owner, a bluish glow emanating from his limbs and torso, shoves aside the chain fall with a sweep of a beam-like arm. He reaches down and snatches a large Phillips screwdriver from the workbench; a second clanging step brings him almost to the doorway. It is necessary for him to stoop way down in

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order to pass through it, and he does so with a great groaning and screeching of his various metal parts. For a moment it appears that he will lose his balance and fall forward onto his face, but he does not, and presently, after a series of clanks, clangs and clatters, he gains the street and disappears from view.

Morton runs over to the doorway. Screams sound in the background; the squealing of tires. MORTON: He's walking up the street, carrying the screwdriver. People are running away from him. By God, Gen! what have I done?

Re-enter HERALD: BLACKOUT EXTENDS TO KENTUCKY, TENNESSEE, WEST VIRGINIA, VIRGINIA AND NORTH CAROLINA—CAUSE UNKNOWN! CONFUSING "OLD-YOUNG PICTURE" OF MARS ASCRIBED BY NOTED ASTRONOMER TO POSSIBLE MARINER 9 CAMERA DEFECT. PENN CENTRAL DENIES NEGLIGENCE IN 20-CAR DERAILMENT IN UPSTATE NEW YORK THAT KILLED 15. FORD TO BUILD NEW STAMPING PLANT IN NEW GUINEA. LEADING ENVIRONMENTALIST RECEIVES SPECIAL GRANT TO STUDY LONG-RANGE EFFECTS OF NITROGEN OXIDES ON VIPERS BUGLOSS, BUTTERFLYWEEDS AND FIELD DAISIES. HI-RISE APARTMENT IN SCHENECTADY COLLAPSES, KILLING 87. FORD MOTOR COMPANY TO RECALL ALL NEW-MODEL LTD BROUGHAMS, LTD'S AND GALAXIE 500'S FOR POSSIBLE UNIVERSAL JOINT "FREEZE-UP". SHORT IN WASHER ELECTROCUTES 17-YEAR OLD HOUSEWIFE. (*Exit* HERALD.)

GENEVIEVE (*joining Morton in the doorway*): Get back inside, Joe, before somebody fingers you as a second Frankenstein.

MORTON: Wish I could get a better view of him. Wait—I know! (*He re-enters the studio, drags the extension ladder over to the right wall and extends it to the sill of one of the windows that overlook the street.*) Hold her steady, Gen. (*He clambers to the topmost rung and leans through the window.*)

GENEVIEVE (*holding onto the ladder*): Can you see him, Joe?

MORTON: Yeah. He's still walking up the street. Still carrying that damned screwdriver. Traffic is stalled. People are still screaming and running away from him. No. Some—some of them are following him.

GENEVIEVE: *Following* him?

MORTON: That's right. Following him. More and more of them. You know what, Gen? I don't think I created a monster after all. I think I created a savior.

GENEVIEVE: Knock it off, Joe. This whole thing is crazy enough without you going crazy too.

MORTON: It only seems crazy because you're looking at it the wrong way. Think for a minute, Gen. Every age needs a savior, and generally one arises, in one form or another. We happen to

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be living in a unique age, and the ordinary kind of savior just wouldn't have done. We needed a special kind: a sort of divine plumber and electrician and mechanic combined who would go forth and fix everything that's gone wrong.

GENEVIEVE: With a *screwdriver*?

MORTON: He only grabbed that because it was handy. Because he was so eager to get started. Give him time.

GENEVIEVE: Joe, come back down to Earth. You're just a cold-water flat sculptor who can't pay his electric bill. How could you possibly create a god?

MORTON: I couldn't. I didn't. I realize that now. I was merely an instrument. It was the people's need for Techmech, working through me, that gave him tangible form, that ultimately brought him to life. They needed a *deus ex machina*, and they got one.

GENEVIEVE: What's he doing now, Joe?

MORTON: He's reached the Square. He's standing by the flagpole. Now he's gripping the pole with both hands and resting his forehead against it. He seems to be listening. . . You know what, Gen? I think he's using the pole as a sort of aerial, that he's tuning in on everything that's going on in the whole country —maybe in the whole world! *(Pause)* Gen! *the people are kneeling at his feet! They're even getting out of their cars!* They know who he is, Gen! They recognize him! *(A siren sounds in the distance.)* Gen! the police have arrived. They're getting out of *their* cars. *They're kneeling too!*

Re-enter HERALD: BLACKOUT NOW EXTENDS TO MISSISSIPPI, ALABAMA, GEORGIA, SOUTH CAROLINA AND FLORIDA —AUTHORITIES CONFOUNDED. FORD MOTOR COMPANY TO BUILD NEW STAMPING PLANT IN ANARCTICA. THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS ON CAMPUSES THROUGHOUT NATION TO PARTICIPATE IN HERMANN HESSE MEMORIAL FUND DRIVE. AMERICAN MOTORS TO RECALL ALL NEW-MODEL GREMLINS TO CORRECT POSSIBLE FRONT-END SUSPENSION IMBALANCE! NEW SHOPPING MALL MOVIE HOUSE COLLAPSES, KILLING 102. *(Exit* HERALD.)

GENEVIEVE: What's he doing now, Joe?

MORTON: He's still standing there with his head against the flagpole. Listening. Now he's stepping back. His—his shoulders are sagging. He seems kind of downcast. *(Pause)* Gen! *he just threw away the screwdriver!* Now he's leaving the Square. He's heading back this way. What do you make of *that*, Gen?

GENEVIEVE *(petulantly)*: What do you expect me to make of it? Why'd you have to get yourself mixed up in such a crazy mess anyway? Why couldn't you have settled for being an *ordinary* welder? You could hve got a good

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job in the Ford Stamping Plant back home. They hire all sorts of welders. We could have been married by now and living respectably in a house instead of living in sin in a cold-water flat. We could have been driving a new LTD instead of a crummy old Volkswagon. But oh no!—you were too good for *that* kind of welding. *You* had to be a sculptor! *You* had to play Pygmalion! *You*—

MORTON: Gen! He stumbled over a pile of garbage! He nearly fell! Oh my God!

GENEVIEVE: It would be a good thing if he did fall!

MORTON: The people are following him, Gen. Droves and droves of them. But he seems so sad, so—so depressed. Traffic has stopped moving altogether. A solemn silence has settled over the whole city—*(Abruptly the silence is broken by the sound of thousands of voices lifted in song.)* Gen! The people are starting to sing!

GENEVIEVE: I hear them.

MORTON: They're singing The Battle Hymn of the Republic!

GENEVIEVE: That's sacrilegious, Joe, and you know it. Besides, the words don't even fit.

MORTON: Some of them do.

GENEVIEVE: What's he doing now?

MORTON: He's still heading this way. I think he's coming back to the studio. *(The singing grows louder; it is accompanied by sporadic clanks, clangs and clatters. Gradually both sounds diminish in volume.)* No—no, he's not coming here after all. He's going right by. . .Gen! he's heading for the sea!

GENEVIEVE *(sarcastically)*: Maybe he's going to walk on the water.

MORTON: He's wading *into* the sea! Between two of the piers. My God! Gen! He's going to drown himself!

GENEVIEVE: Now Joe, take it easy. He may have another reason. Maybe he's overheated and wants to cool off. Maybe—

MORTON: He's walking out deeper and deeper. He's way beyond the piers. The water's all the way up to his waist. *Stop him! Stop him, somebody!*

GENEVIEVE: Joe, calm down. There's nothing you can do.

MORTON: I can just barely see the top of his head. Now that's gone too. . . The whole waterfront's lined with people. They're crying like crazy and singing through their tears. The longshoremen are crying and singing too. Gen! *Johnny Cash is standing at the end of one of the piers playing his guitar!*

GENEVIEVE: What's he playing—the Amoco commercial?

MORTON *(crying uncontrollably)*: It's the most moving sight you ever saw!

GENEVIEVE: Joe, get hold of yourself and come down off that ladder before you fall! You've got it made and don't know it. I was wrong when I said you should

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have settled for being an ordinary welder—I see that now. I don't know whether Techmech was a god or not, but everybody seems to think so and it doesn't seem to matter to them that he chickened out. When it gets around that you created him—and I intend to see that it does—you'll be famous. You'll be snowed under with offers to appear on the talk-shows and to do TV commercials and to write your life story. You'll go down in history as a culture hero. This studio will become a shrine and we can buy the building and charge a $50 admittance fee. As for Techmech, we'll hire a dredge and—

MORTON: *(descending the ladder to her side):* No, Gen—that would be sacrilegious. The sea is his chosen resting place and that's where he's going to stay. Besides, all we'd dredge up would be a bunch of junk. To all intents and purposes, Techmech's dead. . . Our last hope. Gone. . . Let's go home, Gen—let's go home.

Re-enter HERALD: BLACKOUT SPREADING TO NORTHEASTERN SEABOARD—OFFICIALS DESPERATE. PILOT ERROR LISTED AS PROBABLE CAUSE OF LATEST AIRLINES DISASTER IN WHICH 206 PERISHED. FORD MOTOR COMPANY TO BUILD NEW STAMPING PLANT IN TIMBUKTU. BELL TELEPHONE TO ASK FOR DOUBLE PRESENT SERVICE RATES TO AVERT MAINTENANCE CRISIS. LEGAL BATTLE OVER COMPULSORY PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO GO TO NY SUPREME COURT. POSTAL SERVICE THROWS IN SPONGE—WE JUST CAN'T COPE, SPOKESMAN SAYS. HIGH-LEVEL ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL DISPLAYS AMAZING VIRTUOSITY ON VIOLIN AT FUND-RAISING DINNER! GM TO RECALL ALL NEW-MODEL CAPRICES, IMPALAS, BEL AIRS AND BISCAYNES FOR HOOD-LATCH DEFECT. BILLION-DOLLAR SATURN PROBE EXPECTED TO THROW NEW LIGHT ON COMPOSITION OF RINGS. MIDEASTERN AND EASTERN U.S. DRUGSTORES REPORT UNPRECEDENTED DEMAND FOR CANDLES. (*Exit* HERALD.)

CHORUS *(The same five working housewives on their coffee-break):* In the beginning God gave to every people a color-television set, and with this set they enriched their lives. Now our set is broken.

(Exeunt omnes.)

—ROBERT F. YOUNG

ON SALE IN JULY AMAZING—APRIL 29th

JACK VANCE'S NEW NOVEL, MARUNE: ALASTOR 933, LORD OF THE RAYS by ROBERT F. YOUNG, THE WAY OF OUR FATHERS by DAPHNE CASTELL, SOMEHOW, I DON'T THINK WE'RE IN KANSAS, TOTO by HARLAN ELLISON, FULLY AUTOMATED, WITH LOW DOWN PAYMENT by LINDA ISAACS, and many new features.

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AL SIROIS

Al Sirois (or "Lewis S. Allyn," as he was briefly known) made his professional debut with "War Baby" (May, 1974). He returns with a short tale about a boy and his companion–

THE WOMAN MACHINE

JULIA CAME TO STAY on a sharp Decembros day, clear and cold as crystal, weighted with gleaming snow that had fallen the night before. Bright silence surrounded our house at the foot of the mountain, where the elm trees were like collections of bones mounted on poles and sprayed black from underneath.

I was sitting in my room on the second floor, idly trying to capture, in my sketchbook, the pattern of trees-on-snow that flowed from the house out to the horizon.

As I sat there in the wide window seat, I heard a faint thread of sound from outside; my father's car, returning from the city, had just entered our long winding driveway. Then, looking up from my drawing, I could see spurts of light between the black articulated trees, sunlight reflecting off chrome and glass. And now I could see the car itself as it slowly approached the house, proceeding slowly because of ruts and slick mirrors of ice embedded in the driveway, the only moving thing under the peculiarly stretched-out white winter sky.

The white car pulled up parallel to the front entrance of the house, just below my window. The door on my father's side of the vehicle opened, and he climbed out. He looked up at me (he knew I'd be there, waiting), took off his sunglasses, and smiled. I waved to him. He walked around to the other side of the car. I could see, through the polarized glass, a vague shape, but I couldn't make out who or what it might be. My father opended the door, and Julia arose from the car.

Imagine: you are in an unlit room. Suddenly someone ignites a strip of magnesium ribbon in front of you. The liquid kernal of light where the ribbon actually burns to magnesium oxide is so bright as to be almost intolerable.

Now, imagine the strip of ribbon to be about five and half feet tall, shaped like a human being —she shot off rays and sheets of sunlight, a coruscation in the early afternoon sun. She seemed to assume a reality more tangible than any other component of the surrounding ambiance. Burnished and polished, she was bright white light. White metal! A human-shaped mirror. A cybernetic guardian for me.

She followed my father into the

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house as I launched myself off the window seat and out of my room, along the hall and down the stairs.

My father introduced us in the foyer. She extended her shiny hand to me, and I took it shyly. I was amazed to find that it was warm, like flesh. I thought of Julia as "she" from the very first because even though she was obviously a robot, she seemed feminine by virtue of her incredible grace and delicacy of movement, rare in most robots at that time.

She must've cost several million dollars, but then Dad wasn't likely to be dissuaded from buying something he wanted just because it had large price-tag. He was very wealthy from playing rock music to screaming teenagers, and he loved gadgets, especially electronic ones. Our house was full of TV screens, intercoms, little calculators, amplifiers, and all manner of electronic musical instruments. I think Dad was more fascinated with the *idea* of Julia than he was with Julia herself.

That first day the three of us sat in the downstairs den, talking to and at each other for several hours. Dad asked her about tolerances and terminals, and Julia answered plainly. I asked her what she liked to watch on TV and how old she was and did she like ice skating, and she'd laugh and ask me the same things right back. Later on, she made me a sandwich. We were very good friends by the time I had to go to bed.

II

SHE WAS NEVER a real "robot" as far as I was concerned; I was, for one thing, too young to really understand that she was a machine, and she, for her part, was too good a machine to make her mechanical points obvious to me, her ward. I was happy with my guardian, all the days and nights that my father was away touring the world with his band, the music filling his mind. My mother was dead of a drug overdose years before, so all my father had was his music, and, sometimes, me. His money meant little more than material security to him. He always felt at ease with machines. I remember him saying that he could understand them better than people, and could relate to them easier. He knew what it was to love circuits and transistors; his guitars, amplifiers and synthesizers were his "julias".

I saw more of her, while I was growing up, than I did of my own father. She was my constant companion, my friend who wore a funny metal suit that she couldn't take off.

Even as I grew older and learned about robots in school, I never really made the connection between Julia and those others. I knew her too well, as an individual, to think of her in the abstract as a "machine".

III

I NEVER NOTICED her doing it outright, but by this time I had entered my adolescence, Julia had

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developed a definite sex. I was fifteen before I consciously noticed that she had smooth metal breasts, nippleless but perfectly formed. I first noted this at breakfast one day, as she sat at the table reading while I ate.

In mid chew I stopped, pointed my spoon at her chest, and said "What's all that about?"

She glanced down, as if in surprise. "Umm? Oh, stimulation," she said, and no amount of bitching or cajoling on my part could induce her to explain further. Of course, I didn't understand.

Now that memory makes me cold. Stimulation? For *me*? I was old enough to be evincing an interest in girls. . .my god, my god! Who built that into her? Had my father specified that it be done, nine years before?

Or was it her, alone?

I know that I, with my preconceptions and blind beliefs, was often more of a machine in some ways that Julia was. But her sexual prodding apparently worked; I remember I used to masturbate at night, thinking of her, even though her insides would've ground me to bleeding hamburger if I had ever tried to penetrate her.

And gradually my interest turned toward more more accessible females, human ones.

(I sit here, late at night and rather drunk, typing this. I've never been able to get it all down so linearly, trying to explain more to myself than to any projected audience my feelings about Julia and how she affected my personal growth. She is more real to me than you are, flesh and blood illusions whom I will never see, connected to me only by my thoughts, which have been transmogrified by this typewriter.)

The human girls I had were usually cold, distant women, somehow empty, sophisticated and cooly passionate in bed. Machinelike? Perhaps I was searching for Julia in human form. But she wasn't cold or distant. . .

IV

HAVING BEEN a scribbler on drawings ever since early childhood, I determined while in my teens that I wanted to become an artist, a painter. So I went away to art school, to improve my technique, rashly assuming that all I lacked was a bit of technical polish and know-how.

While I was there, trying to transform my talent into idealistic statements about the state of mankind, I met a different sort of girl, girls who were warmer than most others I had known, more intelligent and perceptive, less involved with "sophistication" and materialism.

Finally I met Judy, a sculptress of plastics and metals, a quiet humorous girl with long black hair and a well-developed sense of the absurd. After a few months together, I told her about Julia, and my deep feelings about her. This I was rather reluctant to do, because when I'd told other women,

(cont. on page 129)

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was harsh but not noisy—only their singing was loud. Hawkmoon felt pleased to be in such company and greeted many whom he knew. He went up to a one-armed Slavian—another of Count Brass's men—and greeted him with genuine pleasure.

"Josef Vedla! Good evening, captain. How goes it with you?"

Vedla blinked and tried to smile. "A good evening to you, my lord. We have not seen you in our taverns for many a month." He lowered his eyes and took an interest in the contents of his wine-cup.

"Will you join me in a skin of the new wine?" Hawkmoon asked. "I hear it is singularly good this year. Perhaps some of our other old friends will—?"

"No thanks, my lord." Vedla rose. "I've had too much as it is." Awkwardly he pulled his cloak around him with his single hand.

Hawkmoon spoke directly. "Josef Vedla. Do you believe Czernik's tale of meeting Count Brass in the marsh?"

"I must go." Vedla walked towards the low doorway.

"Captain Vedla. Stop."

Relunctantly, Vedla stopped and slowly he turned to look at Hawkmoon.

"Do you believe that Count Brass told him I betrayed our cause? That I led Count Brass himself into a trap?"

Vedla scowled. "Czernik alone I would not believe. He grows old and remembers only his youth when he rode with Count Brass. Maybe I wouldn't believe any veteran, not matter what he told me—for we all still mourn for Count Brass and would have him come back to us."

"As would I."

Vedla sighed. "I believe you, my lord. Though few would, these days. At least—most are simply not sure. . ."

"Who else has seen this ghost?"

"Several merchants, journeying back late at night through the marsh roads. A young bull-catcher. Even one guardian on duty in an eastern tower claims to have seen the figure in the distance. A figure that was unmistakeably Count Brass."

"Do you know where Czernik is now?"

"Probably in The Dnieper Crossing at the end of this alley. That's where he spends his pension these days."

They went out into the cobbled street.

Hawkmoon said: "Captain Vedla, can you believe that I would betray Count Brass?"

Vedla rubbed his pitted nose. "No. Nor can most. It is hard to think of you as a traitor, Duke of Köln. But the stories are so consistent. Everyone who has met this—this ghost—tells the same tale."

"But Count Brass—alive or dead—is not one to hover on the edges of the town complaining. If he wanted —if he wanted vengeance on me, do you not think

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he would come and claim it?"

"Aye. Count Brass was not a man to be indecisive. Yet," Captain Vedla smiled wanly, "we also know that ghosts are supposed to act according to the customs of ghosts."

"You believe in ghosts, then?"

"I believe in nothing. I believe in everything. This world has taught me that lesson. What of the events concerning the Runestaff—would an ordinary man believe that they really took place?"

Hawkmoon could not help but return Vedla's smile. "I take your point. Well, good night to you, captain."

"Good night, my lord."

Josef Vedla strode off in the opposite direction while Hawkmoon led his horse down the street to where he could see the sign of the tavern called The Dnieper Crossing. The paint was peeling on the sign and the tavern itself sagged as if one of its central beams had been removed. It looked an unsavoury place and the smell which came out of it was a mixture of sour wine, animal dung, grease and vomit. It was evident why a drunkard would chose it, for more oblivion could be bought here at the cheapest price.

The place was almost empty as Hawkmoon ducked his head through the door and went inside. A few brands and candles illuminated the room. The unclean floor and the filthy benches and tables, the cracked leather of the wineskin strewn here and there, the chipped wooden and clay beakers, the ill-clothed men and women who sat hunched or lay sprawled in corners, all gave credence to Hawkmoon's original impression. People did not come to The Dnieper Crossing for social reasons. They came here to get drunk as quickly as was possible.

A small, dirty man with a fringe of black, greasy hair around his bald pate, slid from a patch of darkness and smiled up at Hawkmoon. "Ale, my lord? Good wine?"

"Czernik," said Hawkmoon. "Is he here?"

"Aye." The small man jerked a thumb towards the corner and a door marked Privy. "He's in there making space for more. He'll be out shortly. Shall I call him?"

"No." Hawkmoon looked around and then sat down on a bench he judged to be somewhat cleaner than the rest. "I'll wait for him."

"And a cup of wine while you wait?"

"Very well."

Hawkmoon left the wine untouched as he waited for Czernik to emerge. At last the old veteran came stumbling out and went straight to the bar. "Another flagon," he mumbled. He patted at his clothes, looking for his purse. He had not seen Hawkmoon.

Hawkmoon rose. "Czernik?"

Czernik whirled around and

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almost fell over. He fumbled for a sword he had long-since pawned to buy more drink. "Have you come to kill me, traitor?" His bleary eyes slowly sharpened with hatred and fear. "Must I die for telling the truth? If Count Brass were here. . . You know what this place is called?"

"The Dnieper Crossing."

"Aye. We fought side by side, Count Brass and I, at the Dnieper Crossing. Against Prince Ruchtof's armies, against his cossaki. And the river was dammed with their bodies so that its course was changed for all time. And at the end of it all Prince Ruchtof's armies were dead and Count Brass and I were the only two of our side left alive."

"I know the tale."

"Then know that I am brave. That I do not fear you. Kill me, if you wish. But you shall not silence Count Brass himself."

"I did not come to silence you, Czernik, but to listen. Tell me again what you saw and what you heard."

"Czernik glared suspiciously at Hawkmoon. "I told you this afternoon."

"I wish to hear it once more. Without any of your own accusations. Tell me, as you remember them, Count Brass's words to you."

Czernik shrugged. "He said that you had coveted his lands and his daugher ever since you first came to the Kamarg. He said that you had proved yourself a traitor several times over before you ever met him. He said that you fought the Dark Empire at Köln, then joined with the Beast Lords, even though they had slain your own father. Then you turned against the Empire when you thought you were strong enough, but they defeated you and took you back in chains of gilded iron to Londra where, in exchange for your own life you agreed to help them in a plot to betray Count Brass. Once out of their hands you came to the Kamarg and thought it easier to betray your Empire masters once again. This you did. Then you used your friends—Count Brass, Oladahn, Bowgentle and D'Averc—to beat the Empire and when they were no longer useful to you, you arranged things so that they should die in the Battle of Londra."

"A convincing story," said Hawkmoon grimly. "It fits the facts well enough, though it leaves out details which would vindicate my actions. A clever fabrication, indeed."

"You say Count Brass lies?"

"I say that what you saw in the marshes—ghost or mortal—is not Count Brass. I know I speak truth, Czernik, for I have no betrayals on my conscience. Count Brass knew the truth. Why should he lie after death?"

"I know Count Brass and I know you. I know that Count Brass would not tell such a lie. In diplomacy he was cunning—we all know that. But to his friends he

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spoke only the truth."

"Then what you saw was not Count Brass."

"What I saw was Count Brass. His ghost. Count Brass as he was when I rode at his side holding his banner for him when we went against the League of Eight in Italia, two years before we came to the Kamarg. I know Count Brass. . ."

Hawkmoon frowned. "And what was his message?"

"He waits for you in the marshes every night, there to take his vengeance upon you."

Hawkmoon drew a deep breath. He adjusted his swordbelt on his hip. "Then I will go to him tonight."

Czernik looked curiously at Hawkmoon. "You are not afraid?"

"I am not. I know that whoever you saw cannot be Count Brass. Why should I fear a fraud?"

"Perhaps you do not remember betraying him?" Czernik suggested vaguely. "Perhaps it was all done by the jewel you once wore in your forehead? Could it be the jewel which forced you to such actions, so that when it was removed you forgot all that you had planned?"

Hawkmoon offered Czernik a bleak smile. "I thank you for that, Czernik. But I doubt if the jewel controlled me to that extent. Its nature was somewhat different." He frowned. For a moment he had begun to wonder if Czernik were right. It would be horrifying if it were true. . . But no, it could not be true. Yisselda would have known the truth, however much he might have tried to hide it. Yisselda knew he was no traitor.

Yet something was haunting the marshlands and trying to turn the folk of the Kamarg against him and therefore he must get to grips with it once and for all—lay the ghost and prove to people like Czernik that he had betrayed no one.

He said nothing more to Czernik but turned and strode from the tavern, mounting his heavy black stallion and turning its head towards the town gates.

Through the gates he went and out into the moonlit marsh, hearing the first distant, keening notes of the mistral, feeling its cold breath on his cheek, seeing the surface of the lagoons ripple and the reeds perform an agitated dance in anticipation of the wind's full force which would come a few days later.

Again he let his horse find its own route, for it knew the marsh better than did he. And meanwhile he peered through the gloom, looking this way and that; looking for a ghost.

CHAPTER TWO
The Meeting in the Marsh

THE MARSH WAS full of small sounds—scuttlings and slitherings, coughs, barks and hoots as the night animals went about their business. Sometimes a larger

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beast would emerge from the darkness and blunder past Hawkmoon. Sometimes there would be a heavy splash from a lagoon as a large fish-eating owl plunged upon its prey. But no human figure—ghost or mortal—was seen by the Duke of Köln as he rode deeper and deeper into the darkness.

Dorian Hawkmoon was confused. He was bitter. He had looked forward to a life of rural tranquility. The only problems he had anticipated were the problems of breeding and planting, of the ordinary business of raising children.

And now this damned mystery had emerged. Not even a threat of war would have disturbed him half as much. War, albeit with the Dark Empire, was clean compared to this. If he had seen the brazen ornithopters of Granbretan in the skies, if he had seen beast-masked armies and grotesque carriages and all the other bizarre paraphanalia of the Dark Empire in the distance, he would have known how to deal with it. Or if the Runestaff had called him, he would have known how to respond.

But this was insidious. How could he cope with rumors, with ghosts, with old friends being turned against him?

Still the horned stallion plodded on through the marsh paths. Still there was no sign that the marsh was occupied by anyone other than Hawkmoon himself. He began to feel tired, for he had risen much earlier than usual in order to prepare himself for the festival. He began to suspect that there was nothing out here, that Czernik and the others had imagined it all, after all. He smiled to himself. He had been a fool to take a drunkard's ravings seriously.

And, of course, it was at that moment that it appeared to him. It was seated on a hornless chestnut warhorse and the warhorse was draped with a canopy of russet silk. The armour shone in the moonlight and it was all of heavy brass. Burnished brass helmet, very plain and practical; burnished brass breastplate and greaves. From head to foot the figure was clad in brass. The gloves and the boots were of brass links stitched upon leather. The belt was of brass chain brought together by a huge brass buckle and the belt supported a brass scabbard. In the scabbard rested something which was not of brass but of good steel. A broadsword. And then there was the face—the golden brown eyes, steady and stern, the heavy red moustache, the red eyebrows, the bronze tan.

It could be no other.

"Count Brass!" gasped Hawkmoon. And then he closed his mouth and studied the figure, for he had seen Count Brass dead on the battlefield.

There was something different about this man and it did not take Hawkmoon more than a moment to realise that Czernik had spoken the literal truth when he said it

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was the same Count Brass beside whom he had fought at the Dnieper Crossing. This Count Brass was at least twenty years younger than the one whom Hawkmoon had first met when he visited the Kamarg seven or eight years previously.

The eyes flickered and the great head, seemingly all of brazen metal, turned slightly so that those eyes now peered directly into Hawkmoon's.

"Are you the one?" said the deep voice of Count Brass. "My nemesis?"

"Nemesis?" Hawkmoon uttered a sharp laugh. "I thought you to be mine, Count Brass!"

"I am confused." The voice was definitely the voice of Count Brass, but it had a slightly dreamy quality to it. And Count Brass's eyes did not focus with their old, familiar clarity upon Hawkmoon's.

"What are you?" Hawkmoon demanded. "What brings you to the Kamarg?"

"My death. I am dead, am I not?"

"The Count Brass whom I knew is dead. He died at Londra more than five years since. I hear that I have been accused of that death."

"You are the one called Hawkmoon of Köln?"

"I am Dorian Hawkmoon, Duke of Köln, aye."

"Then I must slay you, it seems." This Count Brass spoke with some reluctance.

For all that his head whirled, Hawkmoon could see that Count Brass (or whatever the creature was) was quite as uncertain of himself as was Hawkmoon at that moment. For one thing, while Hawkmoon had recognised Count Brass, this man had not recognised Hawkmoon.

"Why must you slay me? Who told you to slay me?"

"The oracle. Though I am dead now, I may live again. But if I live again I must ensure that I do not die at the Battle of Londra. Therefore I must kill the one who would lead me to that battle and betray me to those against whom I fight. That one is Dorian Hawkmoon of Köln, who covets my land and—and my daughter."

"I have lands of my own and your daughter was betrothed to me before the Battle of Londra. Someone deceives you, friend ghost."

"Why should the oracle deceive me?"

"Because there are such things as false oracles. Where do you come from?"

"From? Why, from Earth."

"Where do you believe this place to be, in that case?"

"The netherworld, of course. A place from which few escape. But I can escape. Only I must slay you first, Dorian Hawkmoon."

"Something seeks to destroy me through you, Count Brass—if Count Brass you be. I cannot begin to explain this mystery, but I believe that you think you really are Count Brass and that I am your enemy. Perhaps all is a

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lie—perhaps only part."

A frown passed across the Count's brazen brow. "You confuse me. I do not understand. I was not warned of this."

Hawkmoon's lips were dry. He was so bewildered that he could barely think. So many emotions moved in him at the same time. There was grief for the memory of his dead friend. There was hatred for whoever it was sought to mock that memory. There was fear in case this should be a ghost. There was sympathy, should this really be Count Brass raised from the dead and turned into an automaton.

He began to suspect not the Runestaff now, but the science of the Dark Empire. This whole affair had the stamp of the perverse genius of the scientists of Granbretan. But how could they have affected it? The two great sorcerer-scientists of the Dark Empire, Taragorm and Kalan, were dead. There had been none to equal them while they lived, and none to replace them when they died.

And why did Count Brass look so much younger? Why did he seem unaware that he possessed a daughter?

"Not warned by whom?" said Hawkmoon insistently. If it came to a fight he knew that Count Brass could easily defeat him. Count Brass had ever been the best fighter in Europe. Even in late middle-age there had been no one who could begin to match him in a man-to-man sword engagement.

"By the oracle. And another thing puzzles me, my enemy to be; why, if you still live, do you, too, dwell in the netherworld?"

"This is not the netherworld. It is the land of the Kamarg. Do you not recognise it, then—you, who were its Lord Guardian for so many years—who helped defend it against the Dark Empire? I do not think you can be Count Brass."

The figure raised a gauntletted hand to its brow in a gesture of puzzlement. "Think you that? Yet we have never met. . ."

"Not met? We have fought together in many battles. We have saved each other's lives. I think that you are a man who bears a resemblance to Count Brass, who has been trapped by some sorcery or other and taught to think that he *is* Count Brass—then despatched to kill me. Perhaps some remnants of the old Dark Empire still survive. Perhaps some of Queen Flana's subjects still hate me. Does that idea mean anything to you?"

"No. But I know that I am Count Brass. Do not confuse me further, Duke of Köln."

"How do you know you are Count Brass? Because you resemble him?"

"Because I *am* him!" The man roared. "Dead or alive—*I am Count Brass*!"

"How can you be, when you do not recognise me? When you did

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not even know you had a daughter? When you confuse this land of the Kamarg for some supernatural netherworld? When you recall nothing of what we went through together in the service of the Runestaff? When you believe that I, of all people, who loved you, whose life and dignity both were saved by you, should have betrayed you?"

"I know nothing of the events of which you speak. But I know of my travellings and of my battles in the service of a score of princes—in Magyaria, Arabia, Scandia, Slavia and the lands of the Greeks and Bulgars. I know of my dream, which is to bring unity to the squabbling princedoms of Europe. I know of my successes—aye, and of my failures, too. I know of the women I have loved, of the friends I have had—and of the enemies I have fought. And I know, too, that you are neither friend nor foe as yet, but will become my most treacherous enemy. On Earth I lie dying. Here I travel in search of the one who will finally take all I possess, including my very life."

"And say again who has granted you this boon?"

"Gods—supernatural beings—the oracle itself—I know not."

"You believe in such things?"

"I did not. Now I must, for the evidence is here."

"I think not. I am not dead. I do not inhabit a netherworld. I am flesh and blood and so, by the looks of it, are you, my friend. I hated you when I first rode out to seek you. Now I see that you are as much a victim as am I. Return to your masters. Tell them that it is Hawkmoon who shall be avenged—upon them!"

"By Narsha's garter, I'll not be given orders!" roared the man in brass. His gloved right hand fell upon the hilt of his sword. It was a gesture typical of Count Brass. The expressions were Count Brass's too. Was this some terrible simulacrum of the Count, invented by Dark Empire science?

Hawkmoon was by now almost hysterical with bewilderment and grief.

"Very well, then," he cried, "let us go to it, you and I. If you are truly Count Brass you'll have little difficulty in slaying me. Then you will be content. And so will I, for I could not live with people suspecting that I had betrayed you!"

But then the man's expression changed and became thoughtful. "I am Count Brass, be certain of that, Duke of Köln. But, as for the rest, it is possible that we are both victims of a plot. I have not merely been a soldier in my life, but a politician, too. I know of those who delight in turning friend against friend for their own ends. There is a slight possibility that you speak truth. . ."

"Well, then," said Dorian Hawkmoon in relief, "return with me to Castle Brass and we will discuss what we both know."

The man shook his head. "No. I

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cannot. I have seen the lights of your walled city and your castle above it. I would visit it—but there is something that stops me from so doing—a barrier. I cannot explain what its properties are. That is why I have been forced to wait for you in this damned marsh. I had hoped to get this business over with swiftly, but now. . ." The man frowned again. "For all that I am a practical man, Duke of Köln, I have always prided myself on being a just one. I would not slay you to fulfill some other's end—not unless I knew what that end was, at any rate. I must consider all that you have said. Then, if I decide that you are lying to save your skin, I will kill you."

"Or," said Hawkmoon grimly, "if you are not Count Brass, there is a good chance that I shall kill you."

The man smiled a familiar smile—Count Brass's smile. "Aye—if I am not Count Brass," he said.

"I shall come back to the marsh at noon tomorrow," said Hawkmoon. "Where shall we meet?"

"Noon? There is no noon here. No sun at all!"

"In this you do lie," Hawkmoon laughed. "In a few hours it will be morning here."

Again the man passed a gauntletted hand across his frowning brow. "Not for me," he said. "Not for me."

This puzzled Hawkmoon all the more. "But you have been here for days, I heard."

"A night—a long, perpetu night."

"Does this fact, too, not mal you believe you are the victim a deception?"

"It might," said the man. H gave a deep sigh. "Well, com when you think. Do you see yo der ruin—on the hillock?" H pointed with a finger of brass.

In the moonlight Hawkmoo could just make out the shape an old ruined building whic Bowgentle had described as beir that of a Gothic church of im mense age. It had been one Count Brass's favourite places. H had often ridden there when h felt the need to be alone.

"I know the ruin," said Hawk moon.

"Then meet me there. I sha wait as long as my patience lasts."

"Very well."

"And come armed," said th man, "for we shall probably nee to fight."

"You are not convinced of wha I have said?"

"You have said nothing ver much, friend Hawkmoon. Vagu suppositions. References to peo ple I do not know. You think th Dark Empire is bothered with us It has more important matters t consider, I should think."

"The Dark Empire is de stroyed. You helped destroy it."

And again the man grinned familiar grin. "That is where yo are deceived, Duke of Köln." H turned his horse and began t

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ide back into the night.

"Wait!" called Hawkmoon. What do you mean?"

But the man had begun to gal-op now.

Wildly, Hawkmoon spurred his horse in pursuit. "What do you mean?"

The horse was reluctant to go at uch a pace. It snorted and tried o pull back, but Hawkmoon purred the beast harder. "Wait!"

He could just see the rider head, but his outline was becom-ng less well-defined. Surely he ould not truly be a ghost?

"Wait!"

Hawkmoon's horse slipped in he slime. It whinnied in fear, as f trying to warn Hawkmoon of heir mutual danger. Hawkmoon purred the horse again. It eared. Its hind-legs began to slip n the mud.

Hawkmoon tried to control his teed, but it was falling and taking him with it.

And then they had both plunged off the narrow marsh oad, broken through the reeds at he edge and fallen heavily into nud which gulped greedily and ugged them to itself. Hawkmoon ried to struggle back to the bank, ut his feet were still in his stir-ups and one of his legs was trap-ed beneath the bulk of his orse's floundering body.

He stretched out and grabbed t a bunch of reeds, trying to drag imself to safety, he moved a few nches towards the path and then he reeds were wrenched free and he fell back.

He became calm as he realised that he was being pulled deeper and deeper into the swamp with every panicky movement.

He reflected that if he did have enemies who wished to see him dead he had, in his own stupidity, granted their wish, after all.

CHAPTER THREE
A Letter from Queen Flana

HE COULD NOT see his horse, but he could hear it.

The poor beast was snorting as the mud filled its mouth. Its struggles had grown much weaker.

Hawkmoon had managed to free his feet from the stirrups and his leg was no longer trapped, but now only his arms, his head and his shoulders were above the sur-face. Little by little he was slip-ping to his death.

He had had some notion of climbing onto the horse's back and from there leaping to the path, but his efforts in that direc-tion had been entirely unsuccess-ful. All he had done was push the animal a little further under. Now the horse's breathing was ugly, muffled, painful. Hawkmoon knew that his own breathing would soon sound the same.

He felt completely impotent. By his own foolishness he had got himself into this position. Far from solving anything, he had created a further problem. And, if

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he died, he knew, too, that many would say that he had been slain by Count Brass's ghost. This would give credence to the accusations of Czernik and the others. It would mean that Yisselda herself would be suspected of helping him betray her own father. At best she could leave Castle Brass, perhaps going to live with Queen Flana, perhaps going to Köln. It would mean that his son Manfred would not inherit his birthright as Lord Guardian of the Kamarg. It would mean that his daughter Yarmila would be ashamed to speak his name.

"I am a fool." he said aloud. "And a murderer. For I have slain a good horse besides myself. Perhaps Czernik was right—perhaps the Black Jewel made me do acts of treachery I cannot now remember. Perhaps I deserve to die."

And then he thought he heard Count Brass ride by, mocking him with ghostly laughter. But it was probably only a marsh goose whose slumber had been disturbed by a fox.

Now his left arm was being sucked down. Carefully he raised it. Even the reeds were out of reach now.

He heard his horse give one last sigh as its head sank beneath the mud. He saw its body heave as it sought to draw breath. And then it was still. He watched as its torso slipped from sight.

Now there were more ghostly voices to mock him. Was that Yisselda's voice? The cry of a gul And the deeper voices of his so diers? The bark of foxes an marsh bears.

This deception seemed, at th moment, to be the cruelest c all—for his own brain deceive him.

Again he was filled with a sens of irony. To have fought for s long and so hard against the Dar Empire. To have survived terrify ing adventures on tw continents—only to die in ig nominy, alone, in a swamp. Non would know where or how he ha died. His grave would be un marked. There would be n statue erected to him outside th walls of Castle Brass. Well, h thought, it was a quiet way t die, at least.

"Dorian!"

This time the bird's cry seemec to call his name. He called bacl at it, echoing it. "Dorian!"

"Dorian!"

"My Lord of Köln," said the voice of a marsh bear.

"My Lord of Köln," said Hawkmoon in the same tone. Now it was completely impossible to free his left arm. He felt the mud burying his chin. The constricting mud against his chest made it that much harder for him to breath. He felt dizzy. He hoped that he might become unconscious before the mud filled his mouth.

Perhaps if he died he would find that he dwelled in some netherworld. Perhaps he would

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meet Count Brass again. And Aladahn of the Bulgar Mountains. And Huillam D'Averc. And Bowgentle, the philosopher, the poet.

"Ah," he said to himself, "if I could be sure, then I would welcome this death a little more readily. Yet, there is still the question of my honour—and that of Yisselda. Yisselda!"

"Dorian!" Again the bird's cry bore an uncanny resemblance to his wife's voice. He had heard that dying men entertained such fancies. Perhaps for some it made death easier, but for him it made it that much harder.

"Dorian! I thought I heard you speak. Are you nearby? What has happened?"

Hawkmoon called back to the bird. "I am in the marsh, my love, and I am dying. Tell them that Hawkmoon was not a traitor. Tell them he was not a coward. Tell them, instead, that he was a fool!"

The reeds near the bank began to rustle. Hawkmoon looked towards them, expecting to see a fox. That would be terrible, to be attacked even as the mud dragged him under. He shuddered.

And then there was a human face peering at him through the reeds. And it was a face he recognised.

"Captain?"

"My lord," said Captain Josef Vedla. Then his face turned away as he spoke to someone behind him. "You were right, my lady. He is here. And almost completely under." A brand flared as Nelda extended it out as far as he could stretch, peering at Hawkmoon to see just how far he was buried. "Quickly, men—the rope."

"I am pleased to see you, Captain Velda. Is my lady Yisselda with you, too?"

"I am, Dorian." Her voice was tense. "I found Captain Vedla and he took me to the tavern where Czernik was. It was Czernik who told us that you had ventured into the marsh. So we gathered what men we could and came to find you."

"I am grateful," said Hawkmoon, "though I should not have been if I had not acted so foolishly—ugh!" The mud had reached his mouth.

A rope was flung towards him. With his free right hand he just managed to grasp it and stick his wrist through the loop.

"Pull away," he said and groaned as the noose tightened on his wrist and he felt as if his arm were being dragged from its socket.

Slowly his body emerged from the mud, which was reluctant to give up its feast, until he was able to sit gasping on the bank while Yisselda, careless that he was covered in the slimy, stinking stuff from head to toe, embraced him, sobbing. "We thought you dead."

"I thought myself dead," he said. "Instead I have killed one of my best horses. I deserve to die."

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Captain Vedla was looking nervously about him. Unlike the guardians who were Kamarg bred, he had never been much attracted to the marsh, even in daylight.

"I saw the fellow who calls himself Count Brass." Hawkmoon addressed Captain Vedla.

"And you killed him, my lord?"

Hawkmoon shook his head. "I think he's some play-actor who bears a strong resemblance to Count Brass. But he is not Count Brass—living or dead—of that I'm almost certain. He's too young, for one thing. And he has not been properly educated in his part. He does not know the name of his daughter. He knows nothing of the Kamarg. Yet, I think, there is no malice in the fellow. He might be mad, but more likely he's been mesmerised into believing that he is Count Brass. Some Dark Empire troublemakers, I'd guess, out to discredit me and avenge themselves at the same time."

Vedla looked relieved. "At least I will have something to tell the gossip-mongers," he said. "But this fellow must have had a startling resemblance to the old Count if he deceived Czernik."

"Aye—he has everything—expressions, gestures, and so on. But there is something a little vague about his manner—as if he is in a dream. That is what led me to suspect that he is not, himself, acting maliciously but has been put up to this by others." Hawkmoon got up.

"Where is this imposter now?" Yisselda asked.

"He disappeared into the marsh. I was following him—at too great a speed—when this happened to me." Hawkmoon laughed. "I had become so worried, you know, that I thought for a moment he really had disappeared—like a ghost."

Yisselda smiled. "You can have my horse," she said. "I will ride on your lap, as I have done more than once before."

And in a much relaxed mood the small party returned to Castle Brass.

BY THE NEXT MORNING the story of Dorian Hawkmoon's encounter with the 'play-actor' had spread throughout the town and amongst the ambassadorial guests in the castle. It had become a joke. Everyone was relieved to be able to laugh, to mention it without danger of giving offence to Hawkmoon. And the festivities went on, growing wilder as the wind blew stronger. Hawkmoon, now that he had nothing to fear for his honour, decided to make the false Count Brass wait for a day or two and this he did, throwing himself completely into the merry-making.

But then, one morning at breakfast, while Hawkmoon and his guests decided on their plans for that day, young Lonson of Shkarlan came down with a letter in his hand. The letter bore many seals and looked most impressive.

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"I received this today, my lord," said Lonson. "It came by ornithopter from Londra. It is from the queen herself."

"News from Londra. Splendid." Hawkmoon accepted the letter and began to break the seals. "Now, Prince Lonson, sit and break your fast while I read."

Prince Lonson smiled and, at Yisselda's suggestion, sat beside the lady of the castle, helping himself to a steak from the platter before him.

Hawkmoon began to read Queen Flana's letter. There was general news of the progress of her schemes for farming large areas of her nation. These seemed to be going well. Indeed, in some cases they had surpluses which they were able to trade with Normandia and Hanoveria, whose own farming was going well, too. But it was towards the end of the letter that Hawkmoon began to give it more attention.

"And so we come to the only unpleasant detail of this letter, my dear Dorian. It seems that my efforts to rid my country of reminders of its dark past have not been entirely successful. Mask-wearing has sprung up again. There has been some attempt, I gather, to re-form some of the old Beast Orders–particularly the Order of the Wolf of which, you will recall, Baron Meliadus was Grand Master. Some of my own agents have, upon occasions, been able to disguise themselves as members of the cult and gain entry to meetings. An oath is sworn which might amuse you (I hope, indeed, that it will not disturb you!)–as well as swearing to bring back the Dark Empire in all its glory, to oust me from my throne and to destroy all those loyal to me, they also swear vengeance upon you and your family. Those who survived the Battle of Londra, they say, must all be wiped out. In your secure Kamarg, I doubt if you are in much danger from a few Granbretanian dissidents, so I advise you to continue to sleep well! I know for certain that these secret cults are not much popular and only flourish in those parts of Londra not yet rebuilt. The great majority of the people–aristocrats and commoners alike–have taken happily to rural life and to parliamentary government. It was our old way to rule thus, when Granbretan was sane. I hope that we are sane again and that, soon, even those few pockets of insanity will be cleansed from our society. One other peculiar rumour, which my agents have been unable to verify, is that some of the worst of the Dark Empire lords are still alive somewhere and waiting to resume their 'rightful place as rulers of Granbretan'. I cannot believe this–it seems to be a typical legend invented by the disinherited. There must be a thousand heroes sleeping in caves all over Granbretan alone, waiting to spring to somebody's assistance when the time is ripe (why is it

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never ripe, I wonder!). To be on the safe side, my agents are trying to find the source of these rumours, but several, I regret to say, have already died as the cultists discovered their true identities. It should take several months, but I think we shall soon be completely rid of the mask-wearers, particularly since the dark places they prefer to inhabit are being torn down very rapidly indeed."

"Is there disturbing news in Flana's letter?" Yisselda asked her husband as he folded the parchment.

He shook his head. "Not really. It just fits with something that I heard recently. She says that mask-wearing has spring up again in Londra."

But that is bound to happen for a while, surely? Is it widespread?"

"Apparently not."

Prince Lonson laughed. "There is surprisingly little of it, my lady, I assure you. Most of the ordinary people were only too pleased to rid themselves of uncomfortable masks and heavy clothes. This is true, too, of the nobility—save for the few who were members of warrior-castes and still survived and happily there were not many."

"Flana says that there are rumours of some of the prime movers among them still being alive," said Hawkmoon quietly.

"Impossible. You slew Baron Meliadus himself—*split*, Duke of Köln, from shoulder to groin!"

One or two of the other guests looked rather put out by Prince Lonson's remark. He apologised profusely. "Count Brass," he continued, "despatched Adaz Promp and several more. Shenegar Trott you also slew, in Dnark, before the Runestaff. And the others —Mikosevaar, Nankenseen and the rest—all are dead. Taragorm died in an explosion and Kalan killed himself. What others are left?"

Hawkmoon frowned. "All I can think of are Taragorm and Kalan," he said. "They are the only two whose deaths were unwitnessed."

"But Taragorm died in an explosion of Kalan's battle-machine. None could have survived it."

"You are right." Hawkmoon smiled. "It is silly to speculate like this. There are better things to do."

And again he turned his attention to the day's festivities.

But that night, he knew, he would ride out to the ruin and confront the one who called himself Count Brass.

CHAPTER FOUR
A Company of the Dead

THUS IT WAS at sunset that Dorian Hawkmoon, Duke of Köln, Lord Guardian of the Kamarg, rode out again upon the winding marsh roads, deep into his domain, watching the scarlet flamingoes wheel, seeing the herds of white bulls and horned

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horses in the distance, like clouds of fast-flowing smoke passing through the green and tawny reeds, seeing the lagoons turned to pools of blood by the red and sinking sun, breathing the sharp air borne by the mistral, and coming at last to a small hill on which stood a ruin of immense age—a ruin around which ivy, purple and amber, climbed. And there, as the last rays of the sun died, Dorian Hawkmoon dismounted from his horned horse and waited for a ghost to come.

The wind tugged at his high-collared cloak. It blew at his face and froze his lips. It made the hairs of his horse's coat ripple like water. It keened across the wide, flat marshlands. And, as the day animals began to compose themselves for slumber, and before the night animals began to emerge, there fell upon the great Kamarg a terrible stillness.

Even the wind dropped. The reeds no longer rustled. Nothing moved.

And Hawkmoon waited on.

MUCH LATER he heard the sound of a horse's hooves on the damp marshland ground. A muffled sound. He reached over to his left hip and loosened his broadsword in its scabbard. He was in armour now. Steel armour which had been made to fit every contour of his body. He brushed hair from his eyes and adjusted his plain helm—as plain as Count Brass's own. He threw back the cloak from his shoulders so that it should not encumber his movements.

But there was more than one horseman approaching. He listened carefully. The moon was full tonight but the riders came from the other side of the ruin and he could see nothing of them. He counted. Four horsemen, by the sound of it. So—the imposter had brought allies. It had been a trap, after all. Hawkmoon sought cover. The only cover was in the ruin itself. Cautiously he moved towards it, clambering over the old, worn stones until he was certain that he was hidden from anyone who came from either side of the hill. Only the horse betrayed his presence.

The riders came up the hill. He could see them now, in silhouette. They rode their horses straight-backed. There was a pride in their stance. Who could they be?

Hawkmoon saw a glint of brass and knew that one of them was the false Count. But the other three wore no distinctive armour. They reached the top of the hill and saw his horse.

He heard the voice of Count Brass calling:

"Duke von Köln?"

Hawkmoon did not reply.

He heard another voice. A languid voice. "Perhaps he has gone to relieve himself in yonder ruin?"

And, with a shock, Hawkmoon recognised that voice, too.

It was the voice of Huillam

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D'Averc. Dead D'Averc, who had died so ironically in Londra.

He saw the figure approach, a handkerchief in one hand, and he recognised the face, too. It was D'Averc's. Then Hawkmoon knew, terrifyingly, who the other two riders were.

"Wait for him. He said he'd come, did he not, Count Brass?" Bowgentle was speaking now.

"Aye. He said so."

"Then I hope he hurries, for this wind bites even through *my* thick pelt." Oladahn's voice.

And Hawkmoon knew then that this was a nightmare, whether he slept or whether he was awake. It was the most painful experience of his life to see those who so closely resembled his dead friends walking and talking as they had walked and talked in each other's company some five years since. Hawkmoon would have given his own life if it would have brought them back, but he knew that it was impossible. No kind of resurrection drug could revive one who, like Oladahn of the Bulgar Mountains, had been torn to pieces and those pieces scattered. And there were no signs of wounds on the others, either.

"I shall catch a chill, that's certain—and die a second time, perhaps." This was D'Averc, typically thoughtful for his own health, which was as robust as anyone's. Were these ghosts?

"What has brought us together, I wonder," mused Bowgentle. "And to such a bleak and sunless world? We met once, I believe, Count Brass—at Rouen, was it not? At the Court of Hanal the White?"

"I believe so."

"By the sound of him, this Duke of Köln is worsè than Hanal for indiscriminate bloodletting. The only thing we have in common, as far as I can tell, is that we shall all die by his hand if we do not kill him now. Yet, it is hard to believe. . ."

"He suggested that we were the victims of a plot, as I told you," said Count Brass. "It could be true."

"We are victims of something, that's certain," said D'Averc, blowing his nose delicately upon his lacey handkerchief. "But I agree that it would be best to discuss the matter with our murderer before we despatch him. What if we kill him and nothing comes of it—we remain in this dreadful, gloomy place for eternity—with him as a companion, for he'll be dead, too."

"How did you come to die?" Oladahn asked almost conversationally.

"A sordid death—a mixture of greed and jealousy was my undoing. The greed was mine. The jealousy another's."

"You intrigue us all," laughed Bowgentle.

"A mistress of mine was, it happened, married to another gentleman. She was a splendid cook—her range of recipes was incredible, my friends, both at

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the stove and in the bed, if you follow me. Well, I was staying with her for a week while her husband was away at Court—this was in Hanoveria where I myself had business at the time. The week was splendid, but it came to an end, for her husband was due to return that night. To console me, my mistress cooked a splendid supper. A triumph! She never cooked a better. There were snails and soups and goulashes and little birds in exquisite sauces and souffles—well, I see I discomfort you and I apologise. The meal, in short, was superb. I had more than is good for one of my delicate health and then I begged my mistress while there was still time to favour me with her company in bed for just one short hour, since her husband was not due back for two. With some reluctance she agreed. We fell into bed. We rounded off the meal in ecstacy. We fell asleep. So fast asleep, I might add, that we were only awakened by her husband shaking us awake!"

"And he killed you, eh?" said Oladahn.

"In a manner of speaking. I leapt up. I had no sword. I had no cause to kill him, either, of course, since he was the injured party (and I've a strong sense of justice). Up I jumped and out of the window I dashed. No clothes. Lots of rain. Five miles back to my own lodgings. Result, of course, pneumonia."

Aladahn laughed and the sound of his merriment was agonising to Hawkmoon. "Of which you died?"

"Of which, to be accurate, if that peculiar oracle is correct, I am dying, while my spirit sits on a windy hill and is no better off, it seems!" D'Averc went to shelter beside the ruin and was not five feet from where Hawkmoon crouched. "How did you come to die, my friend?"

"I fell off a rock."

"A high one?"

"No—about ten feet."

"And it killed you?"

"No, it was the bear that killed me. It was waiting below."

Again Oladahn laughed.

And again Hawkmoon felt a pang of pain.

"I died of the Scandian plague," said Bowgentle. "Or am to die of it."

"And I in battle against King Orson's elephants in Tarkia," put in the one who believed himself to be Count Brass.

And Hawkmoon was reminded most strongly of actors preparing themselves for their parts. He would have believed they were actors, too, had it not been for their speech inflections, their gestures, their ways of expressing themselves. There were slight differences, but none to make Hawkmoon suspect these were not his friends. Yet, just as Count Brass had not known him, so these did not know each other.

Some idea of the possible truth was beginning to dawn on Hawkmoon as he emerged from hiding

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and confronted them.

"Good evening, gentlemen." He bowed. "I am Dorian Hawkmoon von Köln. I know you Oladahn—and you Bowgentle—and you D'Averc—and we've met already Count Brass. Are you here to slay me?"

"To discuss if we should," said Count Brass, seating himself upon a flat rock. "Now I regard myself as a reasonable judge of men. In fact I'm an exceptionally good judge, or I should not have survived this long. And I do not believe, Dorian Hawkmoon, that you have much treachery in you. Even in a situation which might justify such treachery—or which you would consider as justifying treachery—I doubt if you would be a traitor. And that is what disturbs me about this situation. Secondly, all four of us are known to you but we do not know you. Thirdly we appear to be the only four sent to this particular netherworld and that is a coincidence I mistrust. Fourthly we were each told a similar story—that you would betray us at some future date. Now, assuming that this, itself, is a future date where all five of us have met and become friends, what does that suggest to you?"

"That you are all from my past!" said Hawkmoon. "That is why you look younger to me, Count Brass—and you, Bowgentle—and you Oladahn—and you, too, D'Averc. . ."

"Thank you," said D'Averc sardonically.

"Which means that none of us died in the way we think we died— in battle at Tarkia, in my case—of sickness in the case of Bowgentle and D'Averc—attacked by a bear in the case of Oladahn, here. . ."

"Exactly," said Hawkmoon, "for I met you all later and you were all very much alive. But I remember you telling me Oladahn how once you were nearly killed by a bear—and you told me how close you came to death in Tarkia, Count Brass—and, Bowgentle, I remember some mention of the Scandian plague."

"And I?" asked D'Averc with interest.

"I forget, D'Averc—for your illnesses tended to run into each other and I never say you anything but in the best of health. . ."

"Ah! Am I to be cured, then?"

Hawkmoon ignored D'Averc and continued. "So this means you are not going to die—though you, yourselves, think that you might. Whoever is deceiving us wants you to think that it is by their efforts that you'll survive."

"Much what I worked out." Count Brass nodded.

"But that's as far as my logic leads me," said Hawkmoon, "for a paradox is involved here—why, when we *did*—or do—meet, did we not remember this particular meeting?"

"We must find our villains and ask them that question, I think,"

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said Bowgentle. "Of course, I have studied something of the nature of time. Such paradoxes, according to one school of thought, would necessarily resolve themselves—memories would be wiped clean of anything which contradicted the normal experience of time. The brain, in short, would sponge out anything which was apparently inconsistent. However, there are certain aspects of that line of reasoning with which I am not wholly happy. . ."

"Perhaps we could discuss the philosophical implications at some other time, Sir Bowgentle," said Count Brass gruffly.

"Time and philosophy are but one subject, Count Brass. And only philosophy may easily discuss the nature of time."

"Perhaps. But there is the other matter—the possibility that we are being manipulated by malicious men who are somehow able to control time. How do we reach them and what do we do when we do reach them?"

"I remember something concerning crystals," mused Hawkmoon, "which transported men through alternate dimensions of the Earth. I wonder if these crystals, or something like them, are being used again?"

"I know nothing of crystals," said Count Brass, and the other three agreed that they knew nothing, either.

"There are other dimensions, you see," Hawkmoon went on. "And it could be that there are dimensions where live men almost identical to men living in this dimension. We found a Kamarg that was not dissimilar to this. I wonder if that is the answer. Yet, still not quite the answer."

"I barely follow you," growled Count Brass. "You begin to sound like this sorcerer fellow. . ."

"Philosopher," corrected Bowgentle, "and poet."

"Aye, it's complicated thinking that's involved if we're to get closer to the truth," said Hawkmoon. He told them the story of Elvereza Tozer and the Crystal Rings of Mygan—how they had been used to transport himself and D'Averc through the dimensions, across seas—perhaps through time itself. And since they all had played parts in this drama, Hawkmoon felt the strangeness of the situation—for he spoke familiarly of them as his friends—and he referred to events which were to take place in their future. And when he was finished they seemed convinced that he had produced a likely explanation for their present situation. Hawkmoon remembered, too, the Wraith-folk, those gentle people who had given him a machine which had helped lift Castle Brass from its own space-time into another, safer space-time when Baron Meliadus attacked them. Perhaps if he were to travel to Soryandum in the Syranian Desert he might again enlist the help

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of the Wraith-folk. He put this to his friends.

"Aye, an idea worth trying," said Count Brass. "But in the meantime we're still in the grip of whomever put us here in the first place—and we've no explanation of how they've accomplished that or, for that matter, exactly why they have done it."

"This oracle you spoke of," said Hawkmoon. "Where is it? Can you tell me exactly what happened to you—after you 'died'?"

"I found myself in this land, with all my wounds healed and my armour repaired. . . ."

The others agreed that this was what happened to them.

"With a horse and with food to last me for a good while—though unpalatable stuff it is."

"And the oracle?"

"A sort of speaking pyramid about the height of a man—glowing—diamond-like—hovering above the ground. It appears and vanishes at will, it seems. It told me all that I told you when we first met. I assumed it to be supernatural in origin—though it went against all my previous beliefs. . . ."

"It is probably of mortal origin," said Hawkmoon. "Either the work of some sorcerer-scientist such as those who once worked for the Dark Empire—or else something which our ancestors invented before the Tragic Millenium."

"I've heard of such," agreed Count Brass. "And I prefer that explanation. It suits my temperament more, I must admit."

"Did it offer to restore you to life once I was slain?" Hawkmoon asked.

"Aye—that's it, in short."

"That's what it told me," said D'Averc and the others nodded.

"Well, perhaps we should confront this machine, if machine it be, and see what happens?" Bowgentle suggested.

"There is another mystery, however," Hawkmoon said. "Why is it that you are in perpetual night in the Kamarg, whereas, for me, the days pass normally?"

"A splendid conundrum," said D'Averc in some delight. "Perhaps we should ask it. After all, if this is Dark Empire work, they could hardly seek to harm me—I am a friend of Granbretan!"

And Hawkmoon smiled a private smile.

"You are at present, Huillam D'Averc."

"Let's make a plan," said Count Brass practically. "Shall we set off now to see if we can find the diamond pyramid?"

"Wait for me here," said Hawkmoon. "I must return home first. I will be back before dawn—that is, in a few hours. Will you trust me?"

"I'd rather trust a man than a crystal pyramid," smiled Count Brass.

Hawkmoon walked to where his horse grazed. He lifted himself into his saddle.

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As he rode away from the little hill, leaving the four men behind him, he forced himself to think as clearly as was possible, trying to avoid considering the paradoxical implications of what he had learned this night and to concentrate on what was likely to have created the situation. There were two possibilities, in his experience, as to what was at work here—the Runestaff on the one hand and the Dark Empire on the other. But it could be neither —some other force. Yet the only other people with great scientific resources were the Wraith-folk of Soryandum and it seemed unlikely that they would concern themselves with the affairs of others. Besides, only the Dark Empire would want him destroyed—by one or all of his now-dead friends. It was an irony which would have suited their perverse minds. Yet—the fact came back to him—all the great leaders of the old Dark Empire were dead. But then so were Count Brass, Oladahn, Bowgentle and D'Averc dead.

Hawkmoon drew a deep breath of cold air into his lungs as the town of Aigues-Mortes came in sight. The thought had already come to him that perhaps even this was a complicated trap and that soon he, too, might be dead.

And that was why he rode back to Castle Brass, to take his leave of his wife, to kiss his children, and to write a letter which should be opened if he did not return.

Book Two
OLD ENEMIES

CHAPTER ONE
A Speaking Pyramid

HAWKMOON'S HEART WAS heavy as he rode away from Castle Brass for the third time. The pleasure he felt at seeing his old friends again was mixed with the painful knowledge that, in one sense, they *were* ghosts. He had seen them dead, all of them. Also these men were strangers. Whereas he recalled conversations, adventures and events they had shared, they knew nothing of these things; they did not know each other, even. Hanging over everything was the knowledge that they would die, in their own futures, and that his being reunited with them might last only a few more hours, whereupon they might be snatched away again by whomever or whatever was manipulating them. It was even possible that when he returned to the ruin on the hill they would already be gone.

That was why he had told Yisselda as little of the night's occurences as possible, merely letting her know that he must go away, to seek the source of whatever it was that threatened him. The rest he had put in the letter so that, if he did not return, she would learn all of the truth that he knew at this stage. He had not mentioned Bowgentle, D'Averc and

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Oladahn and had made it plain to her that he considered Count Brass an imposter. He did not want her to share the burden which now lay upon his shoulders.

There were still several hours to go before dawn when he at last reached the hill and saw that four men and four horses waited for him there. He reached the ruin and dismounted. The four came towards him out of the shadows and for an instant he believed that he was really in a netherworld, in the company of the dead, but he dismissed this morbid thought and said, instead:

"Count Brass, something puzzles me."

The Count all clad in brass inclined his brazen head. "And what is that?"

"When we parted—at our first meeting—I told you that the Dark Empire was destroyed. You told me that it was not. This puzzled me so much that I attempted to follow you but, instead, stumbled into the marsh. What did you mean? Do you know more than you have told me?"

"I spoke only the simple truth. The Dark Empire grows in strength. It extends its boundaries."

And then something became clear to Hawkmoon and he laughed. "In what year was the battle of which you spoke—in Tarkia?"

"Why, this year. The sixty-seventh Year of the Bull."

"No, you are wrong," said Bowgentle. "This is the eighty-first Year of the Rat. . ."

"The ninetieth Year of the Frog," said D'Averc.

"The seventy-fifth Year of the Goat," Oladahn contradicted.

"You are all wrong," said Hawkmoon. "This year—the year in which we are now as we stand upon this hillock—is the eighty-ninth Year of the Rat. Therefore, to you all the Dark Empire still thrives, has not even begun to show her full strength. But to me, the Empire is over—pulled down primarily by we five. Now do you see why I suspect that we are the objects of Dark Empire vengeance? Either some Dark Empire sorcerer has looked into the future and seen what we did, or else some sorcerer has escaped the doom we brought to the Beast Lords and is now trying to repay us for the injury we did to them. The five of us came together some six years ago, to serve the Runestaff, of which you have all doubtless heard, against the Dark Empire. We were successful in our mission, but four died to achieve that success—you four. Save for the Wraith-folk of Soryandum, who take no interest in human affairs, the only ones capable of manipulating Time are the Dark Empire sorcerers."

"I have often thought that I should like to know how I was to die," said Count Brass, "but now I am not so sure."

"We have only your word,

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friend Hawkmoon," said D'Averc. "There are still many mysteries unsolved—among them the fact that if all this is taking place in our future, why did we not recall having met you before when we *did* meet?" He raised his eyebrows and then began to cough into his handkerchief.

Bowgentle smiled. "I have already explained the theory concerning this seeming paradox. Time does not necessarily flow in a linear motion. It is our minds which perceive it flowing in this way. *Pure* Time might even have a random nature. . ."

"Yes, yes," said Oladahn. "Somehow, good Sir Bowgentle, you have a way of confusing me further with your explanations."

"Then let us just say that Time might not be what we think it to be," said Count Brass. "And we've some proof of that, after all, for we do not need to believe Duke Dorian—we have certain knowledge that we were all wrenched from different years and stand here together now. Whether we're in the future or the past, it's clear we are in different time-periods to those we left behind. And, of course, this does help to support Duke Dorian's suggestions and to contradict what the pyramid told us."

"I support that logic, Count Brass," Bowgentle agreed. "Both intellectually and emotionally I am inclined to throw in my lot, for the moment, with Duke Dorian. I am not sure what I would have done, anyway, had I planned to kill him, for it goes against all my beliefs to take the life of another being."

"Well, if you two are convinced," said D'Averc yawning, "I am prepared to be. I never was a judge of character. I rarely knew where my real interests lay. As an architect my work, grandly ambitious and minutely paid, was always done for some princeling who was promptly dethroned. His successor never seemed to favour my work—and I had usually insulted the fellow, anyway. As a painter I chose patrons who were inclined to die before they could begin seriously to support me. That is why I became a freelance diplomat—to learn more of the ways of politics before I returned to my old professions. As yet, I do not feel I have learned anything like enough. . ."

"Perhaps that is because you prefer to listen to your own voice," said Oladahn gently. "Had not we better set off to seek the pyramid, gentlemen?" He hefted his quiver of arrows on his back and unstrung his bow to loop it over his shoulder. "After all, we do not know how much time we have left."

"You are right. When dawn comes I might see you all vanish," Hawkmoon said. "I should like to know how the days pass normally for me, in their proper cycle, while for you it is eternal night." He returned to his horse and climbed into the saddle. He had

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saddle-panniers now, full of food. And there were two lances in a scabbard slung at the back of his saddle. The tall horned stallion he rode was the best horse in the stables of Castle Brass. It was called Brand because its eyes flashed like fire.

The others went to their own horses and mounted. Count Brass pointed down the hillock to the south. "There's a hellish sea yonder—uncrossable I was told. It is to its shore we must go and on that shore we shall see the oracle."

"The sea is only the sea into which flows the Rhone," said Hawkmoon mildly. "Called by some the Middle Sea."

Count Brass laughed. "A sea I have crossed a hundred times. I hope you are right, friend Hawkmoon—and I suspect that you are. Oh, I look forward to matching swords with the ones who deceive us!"

"Let us hope that they give us the opportunity," drily said D'Averc. "For I've a feeling—and, of course, I'm not the judge of men that you are Count Brass—that we shall have little opportunity for swordplay when dealing with our foes. Their weapons are likely to be a little more sophisticated."

Hawkmoon indicated the tall lances protruding from the rear of his saddle. "I have two flame-lances here, for I anticipated the same situation."

"Well, flame-lances are better than nothing," agreed D'Averc, but he still looked sceptical.

"I have never much favoured sorcerous weapons," said Oladahn with a suspicious glance at the lances. "They are inclined to bring stronger forces against those who wield them."

"You are superstitious, Oladahn. Flame-lances are not the products of supernatural sorcery, but of the science which flourished before the coming of the Tragic Millenium." Bowgentle spoke kindly.

"Aye," said Oladahn. "I think that proves my point, Master Bowgentle."

Soon the dark sea could be seen glinting ahead.

Hawkmoon felt his stomach muscles tighten as he anticipated the encounter with the mysterious pyramid which had tried to get his friends to kill him.

But the shore, when they reached it, was empty save for a few clumps of seaweed, some tufts of grass growing on sandhills, the surf which lapped the beach. Count Brass took them to where he had erected an awning of his cloak behind a sandhill. Here was his food and some of the equipment he had left behind when he set out to meet Hawkmoon. On the way the four had told Hawkmoon how they had come to meet, each, at first, mistaking another for Hawkmoon and challenging him.

"This is where it appears, when it appears," Count Brass said, "I

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suggest you hide in yonder patch of reeds, Duke Dorian. Then I'll tell the pyramid that we have killed you and we'll see what happens."

"Very well." Hawkmoon unshipped the flame-lances and led his horse into the cover of the tall reeds. From a distance he saw the four men talking for a while and then he heard Count Brass's great voice calling out:

"Oracle! Where are you? You may release me now. The deed is done! Hawkmoon is dead."

Hawkmoon wondered if the pyramid, or those who manipulated it, had any means of testing the truth of Count Brass's words. Did they peer into the whole of this world or merely a part of it? Did they have human spies working for them?

"Oracle!" called Count Brass again. "Hawkmoon is dead by my hand!"

It seemed to Hawkmoon then that they had entirely failed to deceive the so-called oracle. The mistral continued to howl across the lagoons and the marshes. The sea whipped at the shore. Grass and reeds waved. Dawn was fast approaching. Soon the first grey light would begin to appear and then his friends might vanish altogether.

"Oracle! Where are you?"

Something flickered, but it was probably only a wind-borne firefly. Then it flickered again, in the same place, in the air just above Count Brass's head.

Hawkmoon slipped a flame-lance into his hand and felt for the stud which, when pressed, would discharge ruby fire.

"Oracle!"

An outline appeared, white and tenuous. This was the source of the flickering light. It was the outline of a pyramid. And within the pyramid was a fainter shadow which was gradually obscured as the outline began to fill in.

And then a diamond-like pyramid about the height of a man was hovering above Count Brass's head and to his right.

Hawkmoon strained both ears and eyes as the pyramid began to speak.

"You have done well, Count Brass. For this we will send you and your companions back to the world of the living. Where is Hawkmoon's corpse?"

Hawkmoon was astonished. He had recognised the voice from the pyramid but he could hardly believe it.

"Corpse?" Count Brass was non-plussed. "You did not speak of his corpse? Why should you? You work in my interest, not I in yours. That is what you told me."

"But the corpse. . ." The voice was almost pettish now.

"Here is the corpse, Kalan of Vitall!" And Hawkmoon rose from the reeds and strode towards the pyramid. "Show yourself to me, coward. So you did not kill yourself, after all. Well, let me help you now. . ." And, in his anger, he pressed the stud of the flame-

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lance and the red fire leapt out from the ruby tip and splashed against the pulsing pyramid so that it howled and then it whined and then it whimpered and became transparent so that the cringing creature within could be seen by all of the five who watched.

"Kalan!" Hawkmoon recognised the Dark Empire scientist. "I guessed it must be you. None saw you die. All thought that the pool of matter left on the floor of your laboratory must be your remains. But you deceived us!"

"It is too hot!" screamed Kalan. "This machine is a delicate thing. You'll destroy it."

"Should I care?"

"Aye—the consequences. . . They would be terrible."

But Hawkmoon continued to play the ruby fire over the pyramid and Kalan continued to cringe and to scream.

"How did you make these poor fellows think it was a netherworld they inhabited? How did you make it perpetual night for them?"

Kalan wailed: "How do you think? I merely made a split-second of their days so that they did not even notice the sun's passing. I speeded up their days and I slowed down their nights."

"And how did you make the barrier which meant they could not reach Castle Brass or the town?"

"Just as easy. Ah! Ah! Every time they reached the walls of the city, I shifted them back a few minutes so that they might never quite reach the walls. These were crude skills—but I want you, Hawkmoon, the machine is not crude—it is hyperdelicate. It could go out of control and destroy us all."

"As long as I could be sure of your destruction, Kalan, I would not care!"

"You are cruel, Hawkmoon!"

And Hawkmoon laughed at the note of accusation in Kalan's voice. Kalan—who had implanted the Black Jewel in his skull—who had helped Taragorm destroy the crystal machine which had protected Castle Brass—who had been the greatest and most evil of the geniuses who had supplied the Dark Empire with its scientific power—accusing Hawkmoon of cruelty.

And the ruby fire continued to play over the pyramid.

"You are wrecking my controls!" Kalan screamed. "If I leave now I shan't be able to return until I have made repairs. I will not be able to release these friends of yours. . ."

"I think we can do without your help, little man!" Count Brass laughed. "Though I thank you for your concern. You sought to deceive us and now you are paying the price."

"I spoke truth—Hawkmoon will lead you to your deaths."

"Aye—but they'll be noble deaths and not the fault of Hawkmoon."

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Kalan's face twisted. He was sweating as the pyramid grew hotter and hotter. "Very well. I retreat. But I'll take my vengeance on all of you yet—alive or dead, I'll still reach you all. Now I return. . ."

"To Londra?" Hawkmoon cried. "Are you hidden in Londra?"

Kalan laughed wildly. "Londra? Aye—but no Londra that you know. Farewell, horrid Hawkmoon!"

And the pyramid faded and then vanished and left the five standing on the shore in silence, for there seemed nothing to say at that stage.

A little while later Hawkmoon pointed to the horizon.

"Look," he said.

The sun was beginning to rise.

CHAPTER TWO
The Return of the Pyramid

FOR A WHILE, as they breakfasted on the unpalatable food Kalan of Vitall had left for Count Brass and the others, they debated what they must do.

It had become obvious that the four were stranded, for the present, in Hawkmoon's time-period. How long they could remain there none knew.

"I spoke of Soryandum and the Wraith-folk," Hawkmoon told his friends. "It is our only hope of getting help, for the Runestaff is unlikely to give us aid, even if we could find it to ask for such aid." He had told them much of the events which were to occur in their futures and had taken place in his past.

"Then we should make haste," said Count Brass, "lest Kalan returns—as return, I'm sure, he will. How shall we reach Soryandum?"

"I do not know," Hawkmoon said honestly. "They shifted their city out of our dimensions when the Dark Empire threatened them. I can only hope that they have moved it back to its old location now that the threat has passed."

"And where is Soryandum—or where was it?" Oladahn asked.

"In the Syranian Desert."

Count Brass raised his red eyebrows. "A wide desert, friend Hawkmoon. A vast desert. And harsh."

"Aye. All of those things. That is why so few travellers ever came upon Soryandum."

"And you expect us to cross such a desert in search of a city which *might* be there?" D'Averc smiled sourly.

"Aye. It is our only hope, Sir Huillam."

D'Averc shrugged and turned away. "Perhaps the dry air would be good for my chest."

"So we must cross the Middle Sea, then?" said Bowgentle. "We need a boat."

"There is a port not far from here," said Hawkmoon. "There we should find a boat to take us on the long journey to the coasts

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of Syrania—to the port of Hornus, if possible. After that we journey inland, on camels if we can hire them, beyond the Euphrates."

"A journey of many weeks," said Bowgentle thoughtfully. "Is there no quicker route?"

"This is the quickest. Ornithopters would fly faster, but they are notoriously capricious and have not the range we need. The riding flamingoes of the Kamarg would have offered us an alternative but, I fear, I do not want to draw attention to us in the Kamarg—it would cause too much confusion and pain to those we all love—or will love. Therefore we must go in disguise to Marshais, the largest port hereabouts, and take passage as ordinary travellers aboard the first available ship."

"I see that you have considered this carefully." Count Brass rose and began to pack his gear into his saddle-bags. "We'll follow your plan, my lord of Köln, and hope that we are not traced by Kalan before we reach Soryandum."

TWO DAYS LATER they came, cloaked and cautious, into the bustling city of Marshais, perhaps the greatest seaport on this coast. In the harbour were over a hundred ships—far-going, tall-masted trading vessels, used to plying all kinds of seas in all kinds of weathers. And the men, too, were fit to sail in such ships—bronzed by wind, sun and sea, though, hard-eyed, harsh-voiced seamen for the most part, who kept their own council. Many were stripped to the waist, wearing only divided kilts of silk or cotton, dyed in dozens of different shades, with anklets and wristlets often of precious metal studded with gem-stones. And around their necks and heads were tied long scarves, as brightly coloured as their britches. Many wore weapons at their belts—knives and cutlasses for the most part. And most of these men were worth only what they wore—but what they wore, in the way of bracelets and earrings and the like, was worth a small fortune and might be gambled away in a few hours ashore in any of the scores of taverns, inns, gaming houses and whorehouses which lined all the streets leading down to the quays of Marshais.

Into all this noise and bustle and colour came the five weary men, their hoods about their faces, for they wanted none to recognise them. And Hawkmoon knew, best of all, that they would be recognised—five heroes whose portraits hung on many an inn-sign, whose statues filled many a square, whose names were used for the swearing of oaths and for the telling of yarns which could never be as incredible as the truth. There was only one danger that Hawkmoon could see—that in their unwillingness to show their faces they might be mistaken for Dark Empire men, unrepentant and still desiring to

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hide their heads in masks. They found an inn, quieter than most, in the backstreets and asked for a large room in which they might all stay for a night while one of them went down to the quayside to enquire about a ship.

It was Hawkmoon, who had been growing a beard as they travelled, who elected to make the necessary enquiries and soon after they had eaten he left for the waterfront and returned quite quickly with good news. There was a trader leaving by the first tide of the morning. He was willing to take passengers and charged a reasonable fee. He was not going to Hornus but to Behruk a little further up the coast. This was almost as good and Hawkmoon had decided on the spot to book passages for them all aboard his ship. They all lay down to sleep as soon as this was settled, but none slept well, for there was ever the thought to plague them that the pyramid with Kalan in it would return.

Hawkmoon realised of what the pyramid had reminded him. It was something like the Throne-Globe of the King-Emperor Huon—the thing which had supported the life of that incredibly ancient humonculous before he had been slain by Baron Meliadus. Perhaps the same science had created both? It was more than likely. Or had Kalan found a cache of old machines, such as were buried in many places upon the planet, and used them? And where was Kalan of Vitall hiding? Not in Londra but in some other Londra? Is that what he meant?

Hawkmoon slept poorest of all that night as these thoughts and a thousand others sped through his head. And his sword lay, unscabbarded, in his hand when he did sleep.

ON A CLEAR autumn day they set sail in a tall, fast ship called *The Romanian Queen* (her home port was on the Black Sea) whose sails and decks gleamed white and clean and who seemed to speed without effort over the water.

The sailing was good for the first two days, but on the third day the wind dropped and they were becalmed. The captain was reluctant to unship his vessel's oars, for he had a small crew and did not want to overwork them, so he decided to risk a day's wait and hope that the wind would come up. The coast of Kyprus, an island kingdom which, like so many, had once been a vassal state of the Dark Empire, could just be seen off to the east and it was frustrating for the five friends to have to peer through the narrow porthole of their cabin and see it. All five had remained below decks for the whole voyage. Hawkmoon had explained this strange behaviour by saying that they were members of a religious cult making a pilgrimage and, according to their vows, must spend their whole waking time in

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prayer. The captain, a decent sailor who wanted only a fair price for the passage and no trouble from his passengers, accepted this explanation without question.

It was about noon on the next day, when a wind had still not materialised, that Hawkmoon and the others heard a commotion above their heads—shouts and oaths and a running of booted and bare feet to and fro.

"What can it be?" Hawkmoon said. "Pirates? We have met with pirates before in nearby waters, have we not, Oladahn?"

But Oladahn merely looked astonished. "Eh? This is my first sea voyage, Duke Dorian!"

And Hawkmoon, not for the first time, remembered that Oladahn was still to experience the adventure of the Mad God's ship, and he apologised to the little mountain man.

The commotion grew louder and more confused. Staring through the porthole, they could see no sign of an attacking ship and there were no sounds of battle. Perhaps some sea-monster, some creature left over from the Tragic Millenium, had risen from the waters outside their field of vision?

Hawkmoon rose and put on his cloak, drawing the cowl over his head. "I'll investigate," he said.

He opened the door of the cabin and climbed the short stairway to the deck. And there, near the stern, was the object of the crew's terror, and from it came the voice of Kalan of Vitall exorting the men to fall upon their passengers and slay them immediately or the whole ship would go down.

The pyramid was glowing a brilliant, blinding white and stood out sharply against the blue of the sky and the sea.

At once Hawkmoon dashed back into the cabin and picked up a flame-lance.

"The pyramid has come back!" he told them. "Wait here while I deal with it."

He climbed the companionway and rushed across the deck towards the pyramid, his passage encumbered by the frightened crewmen who were backing away rapidly.

Again a beam of red light darted from the ruby tip of the flame-lance and splashed against the white of the pyramid, like blood mingling with milk. But this time there was no scream from within the pyramid, only laughter.

"I have taken precautions, Dorian Hawkmoon, against your crude weapons. I have strengthened my machine."

"Let us see to what degree," Hawkmoon said grimly. He had guessed that Kalan was nervous of using his machine's power to manipulate time, that perhaps Kalan was unsure of the results he would achieve.

And now Oladahn of the Bulgar Mountains was beside him, a sword in his furry hand, a scowl

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on his face.

"Begone, false oracle!" shouted Oladahn. "We do not fear you now!"

"You should have cause to fear me," said Kalan, his face now just visible through the semi-transparent material of the pyramid. He was sweating. Plainly the flame-lance was having at least some effect. "For I have the means of controlling all events in this world—and in others!"

"Then control them!" Hawkmoon challenged, and he turned the beam of his flame-lance to full strength.

"Aaah! Fools—destroy my machine and you disrupt the fabric of time itself. All will be thrown into flux—chaos will rage throughout the universe. All intelligence shall die!"

And then Oladahn was running at the pyramid, his sword whirling, trying to cut through the peculiar substance which protected Kalan from the power of the flame-lance.

"Get back, Oladahn!" Hawkmoon crtied. "You can do nothing with a sword!"

But Oladahn hacked twice at the pyramid and he stabbed through it, it seemed, and almost ran Kalan of Vitall through before the sorcerer turned and saw him and adjusted a smaller pyramid he held in his hand, grinning at Oladahn with horrible malice.

"Oladahn! Beware!" Hawkmoon yelled, sensing some new danger.

Again Oladahn drew back his arm for another blow at Kalan.

Oladahn screamed.

He looked about him in bewilderment as if he saw something other than the pyramid and the deck of the ship. "The bear!" he waited. "It has me!"

And then, with a chilling shout, he vanished.

Hawkmoon dropped the flame lance and ran forward, but he had only a glimpse of Kalan's chuckling features before the pyramid, too, had disappeared.

There was nothing of Oladahn to be seen. And Hawkmoon knew that, initially at least, the little man had been thrown back to the moment he had first left his own time. But would he be allowed to remain there?

Hawkmoon would not have cared so much—for he knew that Oladahn had survived the fight with the bear—if he had not become suddenly aware of the great power which Kalan wielded.

In spite of himself, Hawkmoon shuddered. He turned and saw that both captain and crew were offering him strange, suspicious looks.

Without speaking to them he went straight back to his cabin.

Now it had become more urgent than ever that they should find Soryandum and the Wraithfolk.

—To be Concluded—

—MICHAEL MOORCOCK

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fantasy books

Reviewed by Fritz Leiber

THE CTHULHU MYTHOS: WONDROUS AND TERRIBLE

HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT used the superanatural entities, alien races, and occult books of his Cthulhu Mythos as part of the weird, hintful atmosphere of about a dozen of his later stories Occasionally an entity such as Yog Sothoth or Cthulhu would be central to one of his stories, but then it would be retired into the hazy, sinister background again. For the very purpose of all of them—entities, races, book—was to be and sound eerie, remote, menacing from afar, mysterious, almost unknown, in line with his dictum in his *Supernatural Horror in Literature* that "The one test of the really weird is simply this—whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim." Any thorough-going explanation and systemization of the Mythos would have defeated its artistic purpose. True, in *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Shadow Out of Time* Lovecraft did organize the history and relations of some of his alien races in a rather science-fictional fashion. But he did no more than that.

What he *did* do was introduce into the Mythos affectionate little references to the more congenial of his writer friends. "The Atlantean high-priest Klarkash-Ton" is clearly Clark Ashton Smith; "Crom-Ya, a Cimmerian chieftan of 15,000 B.C." surely Robert E. Howard. And when such writer friends used his *Necronomicon* in their stories and in equally affectionate response invented imaginative and appropriate Mythos items, he would give them his seal of approval by using them in his own tales; for example, such shuddersome books as von Junzt's *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* (Howard), *The Book of Eibon* (Smith), *Cultes des Goules* by Comte d'Erlette (August Derleth), and Ludwig Prinn's hellish *De Vermis Mysteriis* (Robert Bloch).

These charming little in-jokes (as they'd be called today) went a bit further. In 1928 Frank Belknap Long (Belknapius) published in *Weird Tales* a quite powerful horror story *The Space-Eaters*, wherein an heroic Lovecraft referred to simply as "my friend" and "Howard" is destroyed by supernatural forces. In 1934 Bloch did the same thing in his *The Shambler from the Stars*. This time Lovecraft

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responded with one of his finer tales (and his last) *The Haunter of the Dark*, wherein Bloch is depicted (and destroyed—a sort of accolade) as Robert Blake, author of such fantasies as *The Burrower Beneath*.

I can personally testify to the siren power of the temptation to get into the Mythos game. I corresponded voluminously with Lovecraft during his last eight months and it had two profound effects on me: I was permanently inculated with his scientific skepticism toward all branches of the occult and I became convinced that the supernatural horror story and the fantasy (and the sword-and-sorcery story) are as much high art as any other sort of fiction and demand a writer's best efforts—self-and-world-searching honesty, scholarship, and carefulest polishing. In my enthusiasm I not only completed some Lovecraftian poems (*The Demons of the Upper Air*) and did a series of dark, starlit illustrations for his tales (splatter-stencils), I also inserted a few Mythos references into my Fafhrd-Mouser novella *Adept's Gambit* (not published until ten years later) and I wrote some 3,000 words of a modern-setting Mythos novelette to be titled *The Burrower Beneath*.

Then Lovecraft died. I put away the fragment of novelette and soon wrote the Mythos-references out of *Adept's Gambit*; they clearly had no place there.

Elsewhere, inevitably and in a way quite properly, the Mythos game went on, after a decent period of mourning. In particular, Derleth began to write his many posthumous collaborations with Lovecraft, whose contributions to them were at most a brief entry (sometimes a sentence only) in his *Commonplace Book*. In so doing, Derleth began to systematize the Mythos to its artistic detriment, dividing its entities into good and evil powers, making the latter kindred to some degree to the fallen Satan (*I* believe that if they symbolized anything for the atheistical Lovecraft, it was the inhuman soullessness of the universe) and referring to some of the entities as elementals, although Lovecraft had warned of the vitiating effect of the jargon of occultism on horror stories.

New Lovecraft-smitten writers followed Derleth's lead, adding to the Mythos, further sytematizing but also complicating and recomplicating it. Whatever one thinks of this, it must be admitted that it added to the artistic task. The writer had not only to evoke supernatural terror, a *frisson* of cosmic dread, in the reader—never an easy job—he also had to know the Mythos, keep up with it, and manage it properly, a task which became more difficult with each passing year. While the only effective seal of approval was publication by Derleth's Arkham House.

This culminated in 1969 in Arkham publishing the two-volume *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos*. By now even Derleth was feeling the strain and looking for an end to it all. He wrote in his introduction: "Certainly the Mythos as an inspiration for new fiction is hardly likely to afford readers with enough that is new and sufficiently different in concept and execution to create a continuing and growing demand."

Two of the five new stories in the book were by a young Britisher, Brian Lumley. *The Sister City* was a rather touching reworking of the theme of Lovecraft's *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* with material from *The Doom That Came to Sarnath*. A lonely young man's interest in the weird broadens from Scott's *Arabian Nights* to Howard and Lovecraft, until

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he rejoins his fishy forebears by way of an underground river in England. There is even a quaint charm in such statements as "They did not like the bump low at the rear of my bathing costume" and "The short tail which protrudes from the base of my spine in now not so much an oddity as an addition. . ."

Cement Surroundings is more ambitious and rather less successful. Lumley creates a deep-dwelling fire elemental Shudde-M'ell, filling an empty spot in Derleth's occult pantheon, then relates how this entity burrows its way from Africa to England to destroy an archeologist, Sir Amery Wendy-Smith, who has stolen its eggs, which resemble huge pearls, and also destroy Sir Amery's nephew Paul, who is the narrator.

Well and good. But large-size deep-down high-speed burrowing monsters are extremely difficult to make plausible, and Lumley gives us very little assistance here, save for Sir Amery's dread of the London underground, reminiscent of the fear of subways possessing the narrator of *Pickman's Model.*

The only scientific instrument in the story is a seismograph *without a solid base,* because the story requires it to be portable.

Lumley has overly hopeful ideas of the accuracy with which history keeps track of common people. A manuscript coming down from the Roman days of the emperors Commodus, "the Blood Maniac," and "the hagridden" Caracalla, describes how the building of Hadrian's Wall was disturbed by earth tremors and mentions a centurion named Sylvanus' by the signet ring on one of its fingers, has been lately found beneath the ground (deep) where once stood a Vicus Tavern at Housesteads Fort."

Additionally, there is the occasional use of disturbingly grotesque words, especially in figures of speech as in (italics are mine): "I could feel upon my spine the chill, *hopping* feet of some abysmal dread from the begininning of time. My previously wholesome nervous system had already started to *crumble*. . ."

All of which brings us to:

THE BURROWERS BENEATH, by Brian Lumley, DAW, 1974, 95¢, 160 pages.

Building on *Cement Surroundings,* Lumley has constructed a full-blown Mythos novel.

The three chief characters:

Titus Crow of London, British occultist, letter-writer, and profound student of the Mythos.

Henri-Laurent de Marigny, French diarist resident in London and profound student of the Mythos.

Most long supernatural horror stories emphasize and slowly build up an eerie landscape or locale: the Vermont woods, the British moors, the fogbound streets of London, lonley and overgrown islands in the Danube, Transylvania, Wuthering Heights. Not so this novel, which goes directly to more vital matters. Let us examine continuously its first third, to sample its texture:

Nine letters from and to Crow—ll pages. In the longest of these a mine-inspector tells how he finds some "cave pearls" (Shudde-M'ell eggs) and a network of intrusive tunnels in a deep, disused coal mine. It is quite reminiscent of the Horta episode in *Star Trek,* where the deep tunneling is done by burrowing sentient rocks. Its language is curt and colloquial, but over-homely ("In and out of the old workings, lacing them like holes in Gorgonzola, those damned smooth-lined tunnels came and went. . .") and depending on filmic comparisons ("I found myself thinking of giant moles! I once saw one of these sensa-

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tional film things about just such animals.")

Crow and Marigny meet and talk Mythos—11 pages.

Crow naps while Marigny reads *Cement Surroundings*—21 pages.

Crow and Marigny talk Mythos—12 pages.

Marigny goes home to bed and thinks and dreams Mythos—9 pages.

And when Peaslee finally turns up twenty pages later, *he* talks Mythos—16 pages.

Now I am belaboring this, I know, but that is exactly what the book does.

To what does all this Mythos talk lead? Simply to a melange of purely science-fictional explanations:

"The 'magic' of the Elder Gods was in fact super-science."

The Shuddle-M'ell turn out to be "octopus things without heads or eyes, creatures capable of organic tunneling through the deepest buried rock with as little effort as hot knives slicing butter!"

"Shub-Niggurath. . .fertility symbol in the cycle."

"Azathoth is nothing more than a nuclear explosion, a destructive device against the CCD (Cthulhu Cycle Deities—F.L.)."

"We might 'try Ludwig Prinn on Azathoth. ' . . .Prinn (*Mysteries of the Worm*, recall?—*F.L.*) had in fact specified a critical mass of highly fissionable material."

Finally, Azathoth is also "nothing less than the Big Bang itself, and to hell with your Steady-State theorists!"

"The magic of the Elder Gods was a sort of psychiatric science. . . .They implanted mental and genetic blocks into the psyches and beings of the forces of evil."

Now I submit that whatever this stuff may achieve, it does not engender in the reader "a profound sense of dread" or "a subtle attitude of awed listening." Instead, our ears are assaulted by crackpot scientists bellowing pseudo-profundities at each other.

This is not just science fiction, it is science fiction of the cosmic-war-of-the-gods sort which Lovecraft most detested. DAW honestly blurbs it as a "science fiction horror novel."

In the last fifty pages of the book there *is* more action, some of it on a world scale, though only as described in letters and in Marigny's notebooks, and diaries. The CCD fight back, England is saved by a special delivery from the United States of a great number of five-pointed star-stones—soapstone-porcelain pentacles manufactured in Miskatonic's kilns and which activate the CCD's mental blocks, etc. However, the Mythos talk keeps on at least half the time.

The total result is certainly not a supernatural horror story. The Mythos was only *one* of Lovecraft's devices for arousing spectral fear, and he used it sparingly. Here it becomes almost the *only* device—in fact, the entire subject matter of the novel. It is on stage at all times, so how can the reader be afraid?

Well, that's enough top-blowing. Even Lovecraft found that the Mythos began to overload his stories; they got longer and longer. And really there's no way to keep something as specific as the Mythos remote and mysterious when you're using it over and over again.

And after all, it was Lovecraft himself who created the Mythos game, no matter in how marginal and trifling a fashion, so it can be interpreted that he gave other writers full leave to trespass. And no one—least of all another writer—can tell writers how to expend their creative energy.

—FRITZ LEIBER,

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Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According To You, Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.

Dear Ted,

An overview of the first issue of FANTASTIC for '75 presents an interesting and promising picture with regard to content. Though other areas, such as circulation which may yet prove the Destroyer of magazines as a vehicle of fiction, and format which has failed to reach the quality possible and expectable based on earlier innovations, paint a bleak yet not less interesting picture, content evokes many desirable reactions.

All the stories seem to fit the philosophical viewpoint of FANTASTIC, a magazine providing a forum for fantasy and soft science fiction. The reader expecting to find these types of stories is not disappointed by pretenses of strivings to anything else. In fact, the closest foray made at the hard stuff is the "plane without a surface" in "Solid Geometry," by Ian McEwan. This, of course, is treated from an angle unacceptable within the rigorism of hard fiction; it becomes a means rather than an end.

Another story, "The Return of Captain Nucleus," by Bruce D. Arthurs, though employing the artifical world of space opera and the characters of the super-hero—in style only—is neither. Here is a story which uses science fiction as it rarely is, as in *Dune* for example, for the purpose of characterization. Captain Nucleus is not the cardboard and crap stereotype, but a man; a man who is locked into that stereotype and at once is desperate of escape and incapable of real action because of his acceptance of the role. As the introduction indicates, the story, as part of the whole issue, is symbolic of FANTASTIC's willingness to respond to its readers. But let it not be said FANTASTIC ever feared making a point.

Perhaps, the story which most characterizes the issue is Alpajuri's "Asylum in the Concrete." This story will not win any awards for writing quality. Clearly, the writer has not yet mastered his craft. Yet, his insight compensates fully.

The interplay of characters, the affective and the insane girl, depicts a relationship which if not possible as we understand the world is nevertheless human. His use of symbols heightens the action of the story and its mood without artifical device. The roaring sea, the angry sea beckons the naked girl like man's recent past. As she is exposed to the elements she is likewise exposed to the world. The ocean, the primordial origin of man, swallows mankind, the girl. Meanwhile, the affective believes he has

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caused this fall through his own desire to escape what to him is an evil gift: a gift out of his control, the ability to affect, the knowledge of good and evil.

That both characters seem to move about each other without common interaction is justified by their mutual misconceptions about their lives. The girl believes she can control only her ultimate fate, and the affective that since he cannot control his gift he can control the ultimate fate of everyone. The misconceptions are simple but require more than light reading to fully understand. The girl can only destroy her life but, apparently, cannot make a free will choice to live it. The affective cannot control his own life which in turn would control his gifts.

The final scene leaves at least one question. To raise thought is the goal of science fiction; it is suppose to provoke thought rather than direct it.

The weaknesses of the story are minor. The reader might tend to bog-down in the random, adjective-shaker like fashion with which noun modifiers were used to create, in the writer's mind or intent, prose-poetry. In seeking to describe he has clouded the truth of the individuals with the characteristics of the multitude.

Some, those who would demand logical progression even in a story dealing with human beings, might find sequencing inexplicable. The dream, nightmare illusion of the town and the beach justifty the chaos.

I am sure you weighed these faults against the unigueness of the story. Certainly, you made the correct judgement.

Among other stories, "Dissenting" is also interesting. I reflects the role FANTASTIC plays alone, except for its sister magazine, within the genre. "Dissenting" is at once science fiction and about science fiction and the community of science fiction. Again, characterization is the aim of the story. And characterization is more than telling the reader who a person is, what he look like, and what color of shorts he wore or what he likes and dislikes. It is also suggesting and illustrating his relationship to humanity—how he is like and how he is unlike humanity. Gardner R. Dubious (Mike Glicksohn) undoubtfully deserves a lengthy series of hand strikes.

This story demonstrates the affinity of FANTASTIC and fandom. Hopefully, this kinship will not fade in the abrasion of greed and inflation.

J.R. YEARWOOD
121 Poplar St.
Clarksville, AR 72830

Mr. Ted White,

I write to you on regard to the illustration for the de Camp and Carter 'Conan' story, "Shadows In The Skull" in your February (?) 1975 issue.

Is that really what you'ar trying to impress upon you readers that Conan is a savage where free sex is done in palaces infront of an audience?

The story of the final battal between 'Conan' and Thoth-Amom was good but the illustration is repulsive. I really enjoyed the story, and hope future ones will be illustrated with better pictures that represent the story.

DANIEL L. HIGGINS
(no address on letter)

P.S. I really don't expect any kind of reply, though I just wanted you to know how a reader felt.

Your question rather nonplusses me. Are you saying that Michael Nally's illustration does not accurately fit the story? Or that you simply did not like

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the part of the story it illustrated? In any case, I cannot agree with you that the illustration was repulsive. Then again, I don't think either sex or nudity is repulsive.—TW

Dear Ted,

I am writing in reply to a letter by J. Wayne Sadler that appeared in the February FANTASTIC. It made some interesting points that I have been mulling over.

Since reading it, I've been having trouble trying to understand what stories and plots in science fiction these days are considered old-hat. Mr. Sadler had some interesting ideas in his letter.

He says, ". . .are there plots and stories that a really good sf writer instinctively stays away from?" I don't know whether you could say that is true or false. I had never had a story idea like the-last-survivors-are-Adam-and-Eve. But are there many story ideas that are now considered old-hat? Stories that editors receive often, yet they don't talk about?

Exactly what can be defined as old-hat? That question has been nagging at me since I read "Present Perfect" by Thomas F. Monteleone, and the letter from Mr. Sadler brought my fears to surface.

I am a hopeful science fiction writer. I grew up with science fiction, it has been a major part of me for half my life. I have read science fiction from paperbacks and the magazines since I was eight years old. I read even more now that I am fourteen. I have been trying to write science fiction since I was ten, and my one dream has been the day when I recieve a letter of acceptance from an sf magazine.

But now something seems wrong, something begins to worry me. How can I judge if a story I have written is completely unoriginal? How can any writer know that his ideas are old and used, when they seem original and thought-provoking to him?

The only way, of course, is to go on past experience. But this can be misleading, too. The editor of a certain magazine might never have published a story like that of the would-be writer. This might be because the editor will think the reader knows the plot is old, without ever having seen it. (Am I making any sense?)

How can the writer know his story is old?

There is no way. That is the conclusion I have come to. I feel that I have to second-guess myself when writing. I go over the stories I have written previously, trying to find things that are typical.

But you cannot judge what if typical unless you have seen it. This is a paradox that must be overcome. Maybe Mr. Sadler was right, maybe there are writers who know instinctively what is good and what is bad.

But do I have that? Have I got that certain something, that makes a writer from a hopeful?

I hope you have some suggestions on this. Consider for a moment the plight of all of us hopeful writers. It is a loneliness to read, but not feel that you are a part. To be a part by contributing, by doing it yourself. That is what I want.

I have never had the courage to submit anything, so I keep on working. Right now I am only on the receiving end, but I want to be a giver.

Take pity on us. What can we do to know if our stories are solid or weak? If they are original or—typical?

STEVE PATTERSON
330 Catawissa Ave.
Sunbury, PA. 17801

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Good writers distinguish themselves in a variety of ways. One is the ability to express themselves clearly and distinctively. Another is that they bring insight to the situations they write about. There are few totally "new" ideas for stories; some researchers have claimed that there are only seven (or three, or nine) basic plots, and these are constantly in reuse. But beginning writers seem to make common mistakes. One is that they try to write stories which are far too short, too compressed, and which depend upon a surprise twist at the end. The "surprise! The castaways were Adam and Eve!" plot crops up again and again. Editors reject these stories not simply because the idea is "old hat," but because it was not used with any fresh insight—and usually because the story is ineptly conceived and written as well. I suppose it would be possible to imbue the idea—even one as awful as the Adam & Eve idea—with validity if it was approached skillfully by a really good writer, but this rarely happens, for two good reasons. One is that the Adam & Eve idea is banal—and to bring life to it would require of the author that he make the idea of an actual Adam and Eve in an actual Eden believable. This might be possible in an alegorical or metaphorical fantasy; it seem unlikely in science fiction (which is what most beginners who use the idea think they are writing). The second reason is that such an idea—and the whole notion of clever "twist" endings—is a beginner's trait. Seasoned writers do not think of stories in these terms and are rarely hard up for ideas either. One problem many beginners face is that they are hard-pressed to find story ideas, and will grasp at straws. Few if any professional writers have this problem. Every story written suggests ideas (unusable in the first story) for at least two stories more. Finally, one of the most important aspects of becoming a professional author is the development of the capacity for self-criticism, self editing if you will. (See Grant Carrington's guest editorial for more on this subject.)—TW

Dear Ted,

From time to time it's surprising the stories you get to publish in AMAZING and FANTASTIC¡ It's well known that you are unable to pay as well as *F&SF* or *Galaxy* can so you'd think that regularly selling writers would naturally submit their stories there first, and Ed Ferman and Jim Baen are no slouches as editors. Yet Robert F. Young's novelet appeared here instead of somewhere else. It's a beautifully crafted story, finely written, with a freshness to idea and theme. *And it was turned down by Ferman and Baen?* (Maybe it wasn't.) Editors have their blind spots and off days which is why it's good that there are several editors in the field.

Yet you have remarkable luck in getting stories from established writers that are some of their best work—Young's "Perchance to Dream", R. Faraday Nelson's two stories, Mark Geston, James Tiptree, jr., and over in AMAZING Phyllis Eisenstein's "Attachment", Brian Stableford's series of stories, David Redd and numerous discoveries like Grant Carrington who ought to be able to easily place stories with *F&SF*.

In fact FANTASTIC's last novel has that kind of story behind it. I'm told that Thomas Burnett Swann had had it around for years and could not interest anyone in it, not Wollheim who's published most of his stories, nor Ballantine or *S&SF* who have also

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published several of his stories. Then a friend of his suggested trying you and maybe you'ed like it. He did, you did, and a lot of Swann fans were given a treat in FANTASTIC!

Frederik Pohl wrote an editorial for Jim Baen, when Baen took over editing and *If*, in which Pohl reminisced about the editor's lot. One of the things he mentioned was laughing at the potboiler he'd reject appearing as the lead feature in another's magazine. But he also must have done a lot of crying when stories he'd reject would appear elsewhere to great acclaim.

Then there is the "slush" pile from which appears unexpected gems like an essay from Brian M. Stableford, or "Solid Geometry" by Ian McEwan. This is one of the most enjoyable "How to Murder your Wife" stories I have ever read. (Not that I have read many, but it's such a limited idea that what I have read all kind of smelt of moldly cliché.) McEwan's story has touches of slapstick comedy, skirts the edges of banality, has a dash of surrealism—the pickled penis of Captain Nicholls—and a naive innocence that makes the whole story seem perfectly natural. McEwan may be your biggest "find" since Gordon Eklund.

It's taken two years for Alpajpuri to write his second story. And his story reads as if he took two years to write it—beautifully written (there seems a preponderance of unusually skilled writer in this issue. It's almost embarrasing to say that deCamp's & Carter's, Juanita Coulson's and Bruce Arthur's stories were only competently written. Some people strive for years trying to be just that good. And you've got one issue with five stories that would make people green with envy.)

Alpajuri's story is also tightly constructed evocative and memorable.

One of the stories that didn't quite make it—for me—in this issue was Bruce Arthur's satire, "The Return of Captain Nucleus." Arthur writes well, he should be successful with whatever he tries. What was wrong with the story was that there was no surprise to it. He did all the old parody clichés—hero sells out, hero gets doublecrossed by the "girlfriend", the hint of unnatural acts with alien bodyservants. "Return", I feel, was as monotonous as the Captain Nucleus stories Bruce Arthur was running through the wringer.

(People who dispute that Stableford has said anything significant in his first essay ought to ask themselves the meaning of the commercial success of Cap Kennedy, Perry Rhodan and *Star Trek*. Is this bad SF or just bad fiction?)

"Dissenting" is a fannish piece of fiction, and possibly out of place here (in the legits), but it is a good story, a good parody and good writing. If Mike ever wants to write regular SF, he should do alright at it.

"To Be A Witch. . ." was written by a stylist, but the story died for me about half-way through. Grant has written an antiutopia story with all the overly familiar ingredients: the antipassionate, overly regulated society, the youthful rebel, etc., etc. By the time I got to the Monitor there wasn't any magic or interest left in the story.

I have not really been impressed by this series of Conan stories. Howard was not only one hell of a storyteller, but he infused Conan with a distinct vision of reality. DeCamp and Carter can't catch this vision which leaves their Conan a little bland. And "Shadows in the Skull" is really only a fourth of the whole story and is lack-

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ing a lot of the momentum and impact that reading the whole thing at one time would develop. I am a fan of ss and hope you can find and run more ss stories.

Finding decent ss stories must be very hard. I rather wish you had *not* bought Lin Carter's "Black Hawk of Valkarth." The story seemed one mass of cliché after cliché. This story read like it was written by a gifted ten year old waiting for his first pimple.

B. Alan Burhoe's "His Last and First Women" was better in that it did attempt something new for ss, however the climax was underimpressive. We are told that the barbarian violated his tribe's incest taboo, but we aren't made to feel it.

"The Dragon of Tor-Nali" is slightly confusing during the first couple pages—which name goes with which character—and there was a lot of background to be worked into a small amount of room. On the plus side was the sheer orginality in the story. We have all read of witches cursing the hero, but who has ever tried to write a defense for the witch, or picture the hero as immoral and uncivilized. For this alone, Juanita's story was worth printing.

I'd like to welcome Fritz Leiber back to *Fantasy Books*. He alwasy writes an interesting column, but for the last several times he seemed to have talked of everything but fantasy books. I was almost ready to suggest start another column which would be book reviews. I've had the fortune of reading all the books Fritz reviewed and agree will all his assessments, particularly his praise for Ursula K. LeGuin's essay. (Truer words were never spoke.)

Amos Salmonson makes a lot of suggestions of which only one is feasible—eliminating novels in favor of more novelets. FSF has survived most of its life without running novels so I suppose that you could drop the novels without cutting your throat. I'd like to see you run novelets more than one issue between novels. The rest of his suggestions all require money. Money which Sol Cohen probably doesn't have to spend, money he's not ready to gamble with.

Myself, I tend to think that AMAZING & FANTASTIC are caught in a deadend. There's not enough money to expand your size and yet you need to expand your size to have a more variable magazine. Amos makes a strange statement about how going to bedsheet size would generate more room for features. Since paper is not sold by the page I don't see how this would work. A 64 page *Newsweek*-size magazine uses as much paper as a 128 page digest does. One needs only to look at *Vertex* to see that you're not getting much more wordage than *Galaxy* for your $1.50. In arguments over the perfect size for an SF magazine, I would favor a *Vertex* size mag over any other—provided that it is laidout better than *Vertex*.

Gosh, I have reached the end, but not wanting to let dead horses lay dead, I'll finish by saying that "The Kosmic Kid" was well written, but it fails to qualify as even subjective fantasy." For that matter it read like a mixture of the Rock Opera "Tommy", *On the Road* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Thompson speaks of having a drug kit that looked like a mobile police lab in that last book, a phrase Snead used in his own story.

BRIAN EARL BROWN
55521 Elder Rd.
Mishawaka, Indiana 46544

Dear Mr. White:

The February FANTASTIC seems to

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be up to your usual standards; there was nothing especially memorable about it, but it remains a collection of good reading.

I have a few comments on the editorial: First of all, I don't agree that Andy Offut's handling of the awards banquet at the Discon was dull or monotonous. It was a helluva lot better than the average run-of-the-mill lines the chairman of the local Lion's club would give at some annual banquet, but then, practically anything would be. Even so, I feel that the Discon banquet was an enjoyable experience, and I hope to have the opportunity to repeat in in the future (at least five or six times!).

In regards to your "political postscript", I think that by now you will have realized that President Ford isn't a Nixon man, he's only a klutz. I'd much rather have an honest klutz in office that a shrewdly dishonest competent man. Although, honest men have a disconcerting habit of bowing to the public will instead of doing what is right. . . .

The fiction content of the magazine was, for the most part, quite good. "Gardener R. Dubious's" story was particularly amusing. "It's so relevant! It shows profound insight into the ways of today's world! Show us more of Mr. Dubious!" Jokes aside, Glicksohn's story was a brilliant satire. I hope he does return in future issues.

Amos Salmonson's letter is worthy of note. It is a lot more intelligently handled than the usual "You don't know what you're doing because you don't publish the stories that I like" drivel that sometimes show up in lettercols. His suggestion to buy Cthulhu Mythos stories is a particularly good one, one that I'd like to see followed. In my opinion, the money invested in a Cthulhu story would be better used than that spent on Conan tales. This is because I do not really enjoy Conan all that much, and that Cthulhu has at least the same sales potential as Conan.

One particularly unhappy comment about the layout: The subscription blank is quite inconveniently placed back-to-back with one of the pages of the editorial. Please bear in mind that it *does* cost ten cents to get a Xerox copy made in a library or where ever, and not many of us have access to free copying machines. Very few of us want to see our magazines mortally wounded. Perhaps you could back the blank with an ad or do what *F&SF* does with their subscription blanks.

Alan L. Bostick
c/o Hawii Preparatory Academy
Kamuela, HI 96743

See Fritz Leiber's column this issue for one reason why we have not published any new Cthulhu Mythos stories. I might also debate the notion that such stories would have "at least the same sales potential as Conan." I think Conan's appeal is far broader, although I have no specific figures with which to back this claim. As for the subscription blank, don't use it! You can subscribe as easily simply by putting the same information (your name, address, and what you want to subscribe to) along with the proper sum in an envelope and mailing it to the address on the blank—without removing the blank from the magazine or directly using it.—TW

Dear Ted,

I have just returned from a modest convention here in the Twin Cities (October 11-13) at which a number of sf greats were in attendance: Clifford Simak, Gordon Dickson, Frederik Pohl, Lester and Judy-Lynn Del Rey,

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Allan Dean Foster, Ben Bova and James Gunn. Elsie Wollheim was also there, along with numerous local fanzine writers, myself included. The con was perhaps memorable to most for the reason that the emphasis was on what went into writing science fiction.

To concentrate on this point, the last panel one Saturday (the 12th) had Dickson, Foster, Bova and Pohl discussing writing and editing. Needless to say, it was an animated discussion of how each broke into the field, and of their slumps, victories and problems involved with writing and editing. Their main point, which is almost reidiculously trite, was that any prospective writer should keep writing and submitting. Sure it's easy to say, but damn it, it's the honest truth. The real trick lies in writing consistenly good stories. *That's* the hard part.

Now, this reminded me of your editorials in the July and September, 1974 issues of FANTASTIC. Upon arriving home I re-read them and really got the over-all view of editorialship. Ben rattled off some stats to the effect that at times 100 stories went into the slush pile in a few days for his mag. Coupled with the info you provided in the September editorial, I was astonished by the sheer bulk that descends upon the editors through the infamous "slush piles." It gave me a solid idea of what editors go through every day and of what a new writer has to be involved with if he's dead set on making it. I can only envy your feelings of discovery when a new author delivers a gem via the slush pile.

In all fairness, but yet proudly, I admit I'm a victim of a slush pile or two. But, heeding the advice of Those Who Know, I shall continue my endeavors into the well-hewn path of science fiction. After all, it might pay off. All that can be done is to submit and submit again. I urge anyone I know of to read your editorials and, if he/she is decently qualified in writing ability, I tell them to give it a try. As Ben Bova said today, keep submitting your stories because someday someone's going to slip up and buy one of your stories.

Sometimes I wonder about Ben.

JOHN A. PURCELL
3381 Sumter Ave So.
St. Louis Park, MN 55426

The Woman Machine (cont. from page 85)

they'd laughed. They'd thought I was joking or deranged.

Judy laughed, but she made me laugh, too.

My father's band played at our wedding. Four days later, their private plane crashed and burned upon landing at Tokyo, where their next concert was to be performed. I inherited his house, money, and musical instruments, and Julia, who lived mostly alone, keeping the house for the rare instances when either my father or myself were there.

V

JUDY AND I are very happy. Julia no longer has breasts and sometimes (like this time) I stay awake at night and try to put it all together.

—AL SIROIS

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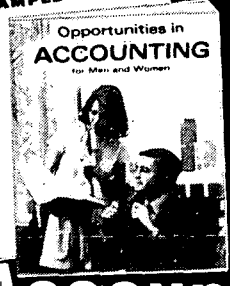

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